

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

*A guide to support system education leaders in
building their professional capacity*

*This guide also includes strategies for further application of
the Community of Practice model within school authorities.*



Continuing
Education
Program



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PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Grounded in the [Guiding Principles and Learning Outcomes](#) of the CASS Continuing Education Program, this guide is intended to serve two purposes:

1

To support system education leaders in demonstrating professional competence and engaging in ongoing reflection about their own professional practice through participation in a professional Community of Practice.

2

To support system education leaders with leveraging the Community of Practice model within their school authorities for a variety of purposes, including engaging staff in professional growth and reflection, advancing initiatives, implementing change, gathering feedback, and generating new knowledge.

CASS CEP Guiding Principles

- **Responsive** – The CASS CEP responds to the professional learning needs of system education leaders by providing collaborative, flexible, and responsive learning opportunities to build professional capacity.
- **Research-informed** – The CASS CEP applies research and data-informed practice to support professional growth in system education leadership.
- **Innovative** – The CASS CEP develops and delivers accredited professional learning about system education leadership based on the Alberta Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS)

CASS CEP Learning Outcomes

Learners in the CASS Continuing Education Program will . . .

- **Engage** in ongoing critical reflection about research informed opportunities for enhancing system education leadership, teaching, and learning.
- **Work collaboratively** with diverse teams to problem solve and apply teamwork strategies for creating shared understanding about system education leadership.
- **Examine** research and data sources to determine relevancy to support planning and decision-making in a culture of continuous improvement.
- **Acquire and apply** foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit for the benefit of all.
- **Explore** innovative approaches to leading and managing operations and resources to create optimal learning environments for students.
- **Demonstrate** ethical behaviours by applying the Alberta Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers and Teacher Leaders (2022), in all matters and interactions.
- **Foster** the development of professional competency in system education leadership within self and others.
- **Evaluate** issues, trends, and engagement practices related to achieving optimal learning for all students in a variety of leadership contexts.

Community of Practice BACKGROUND

The concept of a community of practice comes from learning theory where the term was coined to describe the dynamic and living learning communities that exist in organizations and communities (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Lave and Wenger (1991) are credited with first using the phrase “community of practice” which they defined as a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

The concept is now being applied across organizations and sectors as a strategy to create new

“A community of practice is a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

(Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002)

knowledge, solve problems, advance professional learning and growth, and achieve organizational goals. Communities of practice allow for groups of people who share a common interest or have common goals to come together “to learn, share information, and reach their individual and group objectives” (Research Impact Canada, n.d.). These communities of practice can become “drivers of knowledge

exchange, problem-solving and innovation”(Goncalves, 2024).

Cambridge et al. (2005) stated that communities of practice are important because they:

- **Connect people** who might not otherwise connect.
- **Provide a shared context** for people to share ideas and experiences to build understanding.
- **Enable dialogue** so that people can explore new possibilities, solve problems, and create new learning.
- **Stimulate learning** by creating opportunities for mentoring, coaching and reflection.
- **Capture and diffuse existing knowledge** so that people can enhance and improve their practice.
- **Introduce collaborative processes** to encourage the flow of ideas and information.
- **Help people organize** and purposefully plan actions to achieve desired results.
- **Generate new knowledge** to help people adapt to changes and new ideas.

Community of Practice

CHARACTERISTICS

Communities of practice are unique and different from regular teams or collaborative structures that might exist within an organization. Social learning and “thinking together” are key characteristics of a community of practice (Goodhue & Seriamlu, 2021, p. 3). Members of a community of practice come together to learn from and with each other. They are united by a common area of interest or role, they may share problems of practice, and they may have common or complementary expertise and experience.

According to Wenger-Trayner (2015) there are three characteristics of a community of practice that are crucial to its success:

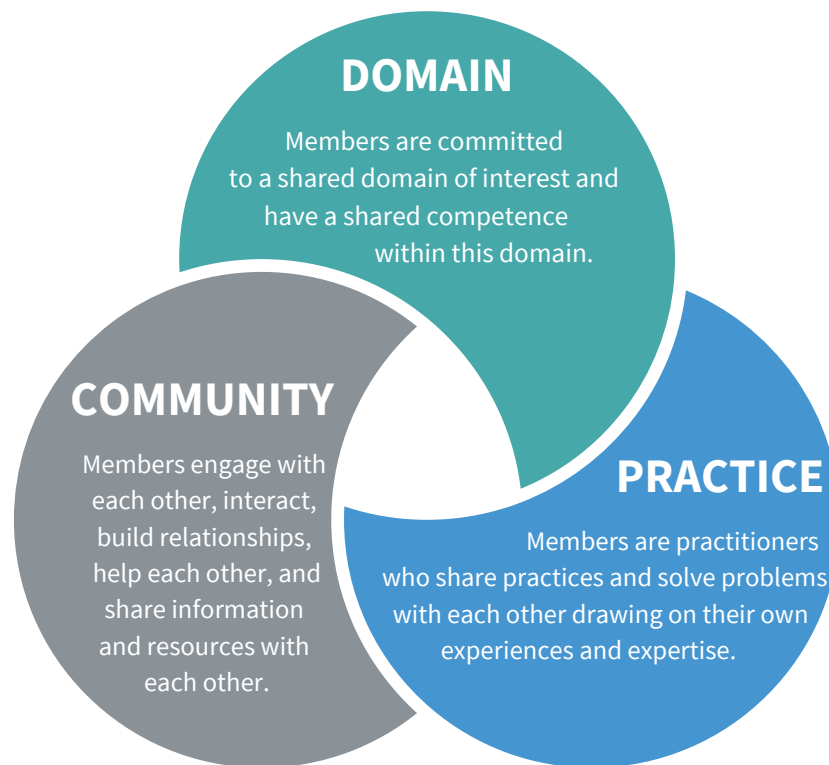


Figure 1.0 Characteristics of a Community of Practice
Adapted from Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015)

When planning for the implementation of a community of practice, it is important to thoughtfully consider the characteristics of your unique community. Each community of practice is different and should reflect the goals and intentions of your organization.

Community of Practice COLLABORATIVE PLAN

Community of Practice Date & Time	Topics, Activities, Processes, Content to be Covered	Resources Required

Connection to PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

- Participants in communities of practice will “hone their professional skills as practitioners (Conn, 2024) and “deepen their knowledge and expertise” (Wenger et al., 2002).

- Alberta’s Professional Practice Standards set the criteria for quality superintendent and system education leadership, which should result in optimum learning for all students (Alberta Education, 2023a, 2023b). Both the Leadership Quality Standard and the Superintendent Quality Standard include competencies that reference a commitment to ongoing professional learning and continued growth.

“

A leader engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to identify opportunities for improving leadership, teaching and learning.

(Alberta Education, 2023a, p. 3)

”

- Superintendents and system education leaders are therefore obliged to engage in self-reflective practices and identify areas for continued growth and development.
- Participation in an effective community of practice may be one way that superintendents and system education leaders can reflect on their own practice and continue to improve their skills as leaders.

“

A superintendent engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection, identifying and acting on research-informed opportunities for enhancing leadership, teaching and learning, and completes professional learning on the code of professional conduct for teachers and teacher leaders.

(Alberta Education, 2023b, p. 3)

”

- The learning and new knowledge acquired from participating in a community of practice will not automatically translate into improved professional practice. Participants need to engage in self-reflective practice and connect the learning to their own professional competency, purposefully planning to implement their new knowledge, skills, or learning.
- Self-reflective practice may not be something that comes naturally. It requires certain skills and techniques. For more information about self-reflective practice, please visit the CASS Self-Reflective Practice for System Education Leaders page on their website.

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