



# 'SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT'

DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE TO SUPPORT INNOVATION IN HE PEDAGOGY.

THE THIRD IN A SERIES OF THREE EBOOKS ON THE SHOUT4HE PROJECT.



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# INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to the third and final e-book in our series of three guides to open educational practice (OEP) in the context of higher education (HE) teaching. These guides were compiled by the SHOUT4HE project as companion resources to the SHOUT4HE recognition framework and our library of video examples available at [library.shout4he.eu](http://library.shout4he.eu).

In the first guide, Shout Out, we detail our 3D framework which aligns teachers' pedagogical and technological competences over three stages of development, from discovery and discussion phases, through the design and deployment of new practices, to a point where teachers demonstrate and disseminate examples of their technology-mediated pedagogy to others in their immediate environment as well as in wider contexts across disciplines, institutions, and even at national or transnational level.

In the second e-book, Your Shout, the focus is on the video examples and advice HE teachers have for one another regarding the specifics of discussion and collaboration on pedagogical innovation, on course design, student needs, and institutional support.

This third volume in the series, Something to shout about, brings attention to issues of sustainability and community of practice. We begin with a short introduction to these topics.

# COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

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One way of developing and maintaining teacher agency while also encouraging less transmissive, top-down pedagogical practices is by encouraging alternative networks where teachers can share experiences and develop new ideas in a sheltered environment. One such kind of alternative network is the community of practice (CoP), a term often attributed to Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991).

## Defining CoPs

A community of practice can be defined as:

a naturally occurring and evolving collection of people who together engage in particular kinds of activity, and who come to develop and share ways of doing things – ways of talking, beliefs, values, and practices – as a result of their joint involvement in that activity (Galagan 1993: 33)

While HE teachers work in formal learning contexts, where students enroll in specific classes with a particular number of contact hours, organised into courses to provide a certain level of training in a given field, they can also collaborate amongst themselves, informally in the corridors between classes or in the staff room, and more formally at department meetings or through cross-disciplinary initiatives, for example.

## Shared practice, evolving over time

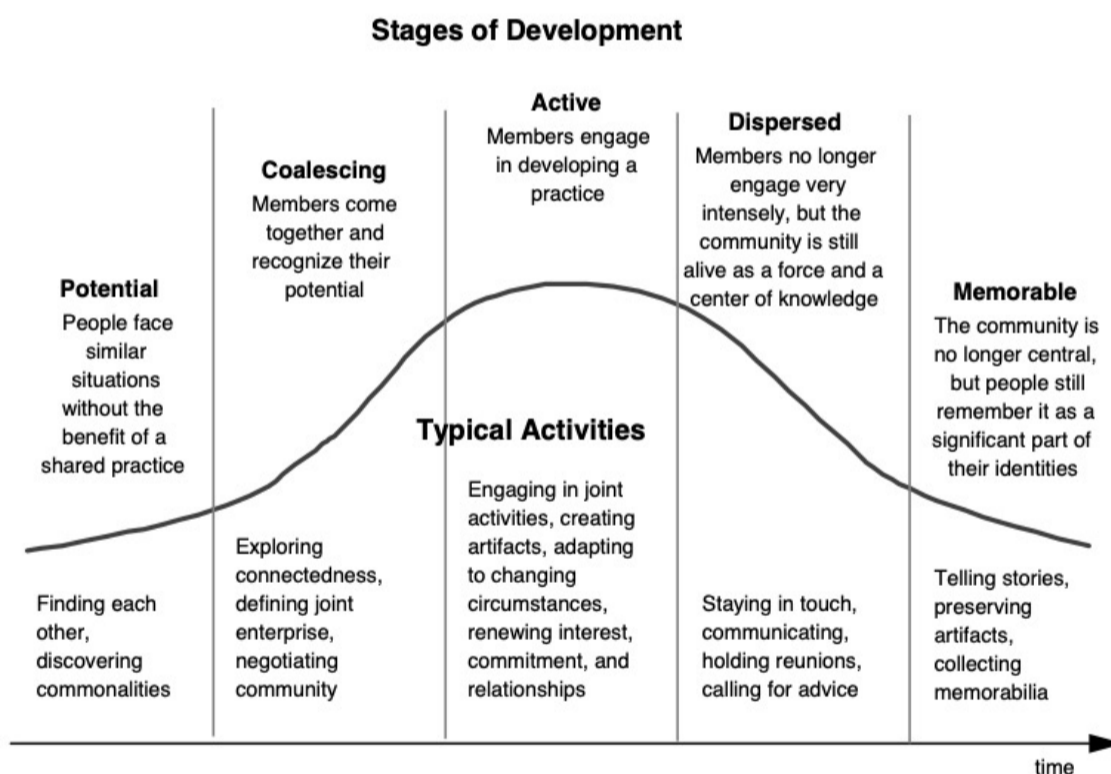
The notion of community of practice is perhaps most closely associated with Swiss education theorist Etienne Wenger who set out the following definition in 1998:

Members of a community are informally bound by what they do together— from engaging in lunchtime discussions to solving difficult problems—and by what they have learned through their mutual engagement in these activities. A community of practice is thus different from a community of interest or a geographical community, neither of which implies a shared practice.

A community of practice defines itself along three dimensions:

- What it is about—its joint enterprise as understood and continually re negotiated by its members
- How it functions—the relationships of mutual engagement that bind members together into a social entity
- What capability it has produced—the shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time.

Wenger (1998) also notes that communities of practice are not fixed groups; rather they evolve over time, and their members' engagement may also wax and wane as interests and expertise develop and mature. He sketches different stages thus:



## Expertise and CoP membership

A community of practice may involve some or all of the following characteristics:

- a common purpose and shared task
- an emergent rather than official group structure (which may even undermine institutional organisation)
- emphasis on talking or narration to understand problems and find solutions

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- tacit knowledge: 'the capacity to do something without necessarily being able to explain it'
- enculturation, or socialisation into the culture of the community (Harris, 2006, cited in Whyte 2015).

We might wonder how becoming an expert in a given area and becoming a membership of a CoP in that area are related: does expertise lead to peer recognition and integration into a CoP, or does joining the CoP lead to expertise? Perhaps there may be a two-way interaction?

For Lave (1991) the CoP is central:

'learning should be viewed 'not as a process of socially shared cognition that results in the end in the internalization of knowledge by individuals, but as a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice'. (Lave, 1991: 65).

She goes on to argue that:

'developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgeably skilful are part of the same process, with the former motivating, shaping, and giving meaning to the latter, which it subsumes' (Lave, 1991, p. 65).

So while we might think of a more experienced HE teacher mentoring a new colleague as an example of passing on information to allow someone to become a full member of the teaching community, with knowledge preceding membership, for Lave, acquiring new information and joining the community of practice are two sides of the same coin.

Communities of practice can contribute to removing obstacles to open educational practice such as lack of knowledge of particular tools and technologies, difficulties in separating or combining the personal and professional in online spaces, and possible gaps between teachers' own previous learning experiences and their students' future needs.

Many of today's HE teachers were educated in methods focusing on fixed principles of transmission of disciplinary knowledge and gatekeeping which may not correspond to the needs of the students in their current classes, and have not provided a basis for their own ongoing professional development either. In this e-book we look at examples from the SHOUT4HE project which speak to the notion of communities of practice in HE pedagogy to find out what can be learned from the project and what key considerations other HE teachers can take away.

# INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION: RECOGNISING LOCAL AND NATIONAL COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Communities of practice can develop from grassroots initiatives or benefit from institutional support. In this section we look at institutional recognition for pedagogical innovation which may precede or follow new practices.

## The case of HE pedagogical support centres

In another of our videos (<https://library.shout4he.eu/video/28>), Sinead Spain from University of Limerick details the redesign of an intensive workshop run by the Centre for Transformative Learning team in UL using a virtual planning tool and discusses the application of using virtual collaboration spaces in other contexts. As one of the participants in the workshop noted: 'As a result of the time in the breakout room, we were able to have a very good discussion among the team of tutors as to how we might amend our delivery to adapt to the virtual world. Of course, this is just the beginning for us but I think that we are on the right path and it is really great to have such a great framework to use going forward.'



Sharing Open Education Practices  
Using Technology for Higher Education

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*Collaborative  
curriculum design  
using planning tools*



Source: Giulia Forsythe (CC BY NC SA)

To learn more, listen to Sinead <https://library.shout4he.eu/video/28>



In Sinead's words:

'This is somewhat like a Russian doll of sharing practice: participants share their practice in the sessions while planning their modules, and we develop and share this approach to delivering a collaborative session with each other, and we are sharing this with other educational developers doing similar sessions elsewhere' (6.40)

This experience has been a true example of engagement with open educational practice as advocated by Laurillard (2012), seeing a shift from the individual design of learning to the co-design of learning where teachers build 'pedagogical patterns' as part of an innovative, professional learning community, building on the designs of others; articulating their pedagogy; adopting, adapting, testing and improving learning designs; and co-creating and sharing their learning designs.

A related example comes from Université Côte d'Azur, which offers HE teachers a continuous professional development opportunity in the form of a two-year postgraduate certificate in higher education teaching and learning based on an active pedagogy model. Around 16 teachers benefit every year from this opportunity and Nathalie Oriol, an associate professor of management with a 15 years teaching experience is one of the first alumni of this program. In her open educational practice, Nathalie shares the serious game approach that she implemented with the learning management system Moodle and Zoom (including breakout rooms).



Learn more about this practice : <https://library.shout4he.eu/video/serious-game-in-business-teaching-at-master-level>

Nathalie highlights the crucial role played by professional development workshops, as well as the exchange of good practices within teacher community of practice at UCA:

‘I was inspired by the methods I learned during training, particularly by the active learning approaches such as problem-based learning and project-based learning.’

Her recommendations to other colleagues for ensuring the success of technology-enhanced teaching and learning are as follows:

‘We have to adapt the technology to our pedagogical approach and not vice and versa. At the same time it is important to be open to explore the various possibilities that the technology might offer. We need to remain open minded and find ways to have fun both for us as teachers and for students.’

## **From local design teams to (trans)national networks**

As we have seen, community of practice development can occur from the ground up, starting with engaged individual HE teachers seeking to make changes and engage like-minded colleagues. But CoPs can also benefit from institutional support, as Wouter Hustinx at PXL in Hasselt, Belgium explains. As head of research in educational innovation, Wouter has set up teacher design teams to encourage collaboration towards pedagogical change. A teacher design team can be described as a group of two or more teachers who (re-)design curriculum materials together (Handelzalts, 2009) and studies show that a successful design process should be facilitated with sufficient time and support (Handelzalts, 2009; Huizinga, Handelzalts, Nieveen & Voogt, 2015). At PXL for example, a full academic year was devoted to a particular design task involving 360° technology for teacher education.

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Listen to Wouter explain in more detail (chapter 5 of <https://library.shout4he.eu/video/4>).

According to Wouter, the community aspect of the teams is crucial, as is his constant concern to make each step both collaborative and available to other HE teachers outside his institution:

‘We have worked with teacher design teams, a group of colleagues who have designed this new curriculum material together. This is a very ‘open’ approach. We have described the results in an ‘open’ journal as well. We currently work on an open platform in order to share the material as an open educational resource. This allows others to use it as well.’

For Ulysse Delabre at Bordeaux University, CoP development emerged after he implemented new practices, rather than before. He describes a now well-established practice that has been used for some six years in an introductory physics course designed for large cohorts (350 – 400 undergraduate students). He coined the term Smartphonics to describe the practice that achieves a fine blend of explicit teacher instruction and hands-on student experimentation inside and outside of the classroom. The video covers many important points, including transforming traditional classroom-based labs to smartphone-enabled mobile labs before the COVID-19 pandemic then to at-home labs or “lockdown experiments” at the height of the pandemic.



<https://library.shout4he.eu/video/18>

Ulysse describes the development of the smartphonics CoP in these terms: We started with two students then twelve teachers here in Bordeaux. We learnt about the technology at the same time as the students, and managed together to bootstrap ourselves into learning about the field of Smartphonics. We were able to upscale the teaching practice for the whole first-year cohort of around 350 students and the practice has since been taken up by colleagues at Aix-Marseille University, at Paris Orsay University, Paris Sorbonne University and even colleagues abroad so that we now have a European Smartphonics network. We've curated all our resources that are forever expanding on a site called smartphonique.fr that is used by school teachers in our region. On a national level we've contributed to the Uniciel platform and on a European level we've created smartphysicslab that brings together different initiatives in this field of using smartphones as well as other objects for scientific experiments. (04:24)

This CoP is now well developed across networks and platforms where the initiatives can be disseminated (see The Conversation) and extended to students: the aim is now to connect student experimenters in the service of mutual learning goals.

## Straddling the teacher/student divide: communities of practice in healthcare and education

Emma Thayer and Tom Breeze at Cardiff Metropolitan University have brought podcasting to their courses for pre-service teachers of music and drama. This practice allows them to integrate the technology students will need in their teaching careers into the course as well as offer more flexibility in their study schedules – ‘like radio, it fits in those dead little gaps. It fits into the commute, it fits into doing the ironing, walking the dog’.



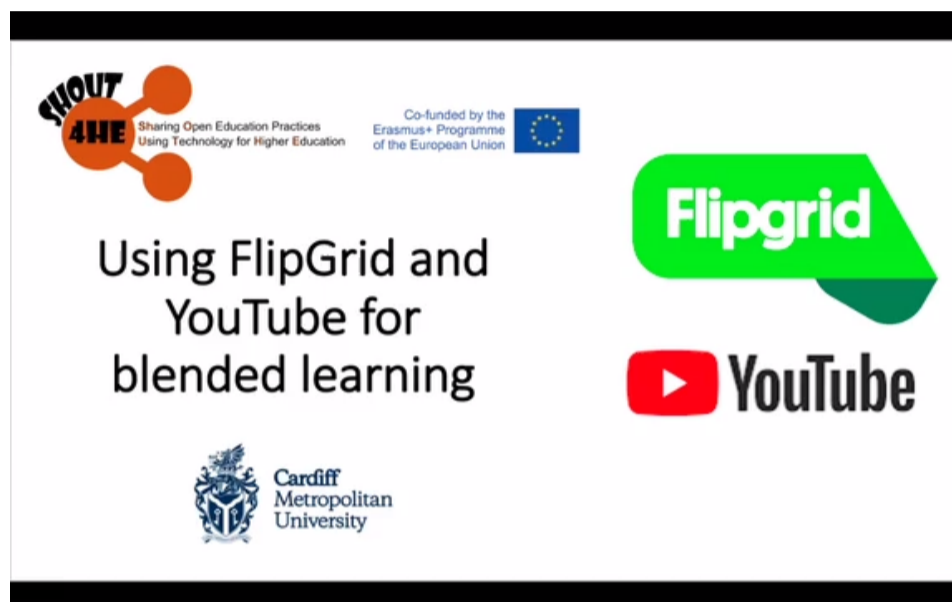
For more on this practice see <https://library.shout4he.eu/video/using-podcasting-on-initial-teacher-education-courses-to-enhance-learning-and-teaching>

However, more importantly for our purpose here, the practice allows the HE teachers to share and enhance their teaching practice. By sharing content with podcast listeners, the HE teachers become part of their own learning community. The students are able to experience the benefits of a professional learning community in the early stages of their teaching career. This allows these pre-service teachers to lean on experts for content and advice whilst trying out their own ideas in a sheltered environment.

A second example from the same institution also focused on a sense of belonging leading developed via online communities, which can lead to a more positive and engaging learning and teaching process, and became particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic. The HE teachers noted that

‘the students didn’t know what to do, a lot of them were lonely, a lot of them were still in halls so we turned to technology to try and promote some sort of course belongingness.’

They used platforms such as FlipGrid and YouTube which they found to be ‘a really good place to be a little bit more informal, a little bit more fun.’



Using FlipGrid and YouTube for blended learning (available at: <https://library.shout4he.eu/video/11>)

There were clear advantages to using technology in a creative and fun way which replaced some of the socialisation and interaction that can be lost when moving away from face-to-face teaching. The HE teachers aimed to keep sane during a very weird and wonderful time of the first lockdown’ and show students that ‘we’re all in this together really.’

A final example of CoP development comes from a Université Côte d’Azur healthcare course which modelled collaborative professional action by having students from different courses work together on a health-related task (devising and running a substance-abuse prevention programme for students). The HE teachers involved were very aware of the reflexive self-embedding or Russian doll aspect of this course:

‘In the end the project worked like a sandbox, allowing students not to have to act immediately, to respond to questions, and not to say “I’ve learned these subjects” but rather to come to understand that there are competences to be acquired. These are mainly skills of listening and of being with

the person so that there is a relationship of trust that is built up and that is also in the end mirroring what we as teachers try to establish with the students: they should also have confidence in our benevolence but respect the requirements we impose.’



Learn more here: <https://library.shout4he.eu/video/health-care-substance-use-prevention>

Student feedback confirmed the success of the approach

‘I think that all the obstacles we had to face are quite representative of our future life so it’s going to be interesting it’s really useful for our whole life in general in fact, other than prevention, and that’s what’s really valuable.

By having students collaborate with peers in different disciplines on an authentic project, the HE teachers created conditions for the development on an embryonic CoP for the students. Just as they hoped students would learn to take the patients as key actors in any health encounter, so they as HE educators aimed to place the students at the centre of the learning process. This CoP therefore included members with roles as patients, student health professionals, and expert health practitioners whose complementary experiences and knowledge contributed to the development of learning for all.’

# KEY CONSIDERATIONS

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To develop effective communities of practice (CoPs) to enable sharing of OEPs, and develop significant conversations about teaching in HE, we have found:

- Hearing different voices from different disciplines is very beneficial and enriches conversations:
- what is normal practice in one discipline can be innovative in another, and at the same time it may be reassuring to find a problem is common to other disciplines
- looking at a challenge you are facing through another lens can be very helpful.
- Looking outside of your own university is beneficial for reflecting on your own setting – especially in different countries
- CoPs should have a flat hierarchy: it should not matter what your academic position is, and indeed students, student-teachers, new and experienced HE teachers all have their place in a CoP
- Emergency teaching during the pandemic has highlighted the positive role technology can play not only in delivering content but also in developing social connections and learning communities; ongoing pedagogical innovation can build on this particularly through attention to CoPs
- The development of any CoP takes time and cannot be rushed; mutual trust is essential but develops gradually, and humour also helps HE teachers not to take themselves too seriously!



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