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A Tale of Two Communities of Practice: Building SoTL across a diverse Science and Engineering Faculty

Session 3B Brooks 2.15, Thursday 16th June 2022, 2pm-3pm

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Faculty of Science and Engineering

- Five academic departments
 - Natural Sciences
 - Engineering
 - Computing and Mathematics
 - Life Sciences (Biomedical Sciences, Physiology)
 - Sport and Exercise Sciences
- 350+ academics - approx. 50 aligned to the education career pathway



Our intentions for today

- Hear our candid views of what worked and what didn't work in our two communities of practice
- Be challenged to consider nuances of success in this context and what is realistic in SoTL communities
- Reflect together on overlap between principles of SoTL and academic Communities of Practice

Community 1 – Education Escapes

Membership	Open to all staff in Faculty
Genesis	Since 2018
<i>Modus operandi</i>	Place to ‘escape the day job’ and debate contemporary topics catalysed by thought-provoking speakers Eight meetings per year Membership diffuse and in some senses transient
Desired outcomes	Participants keep attending Practice and innovation is shared People leave feeling refreshed and energised

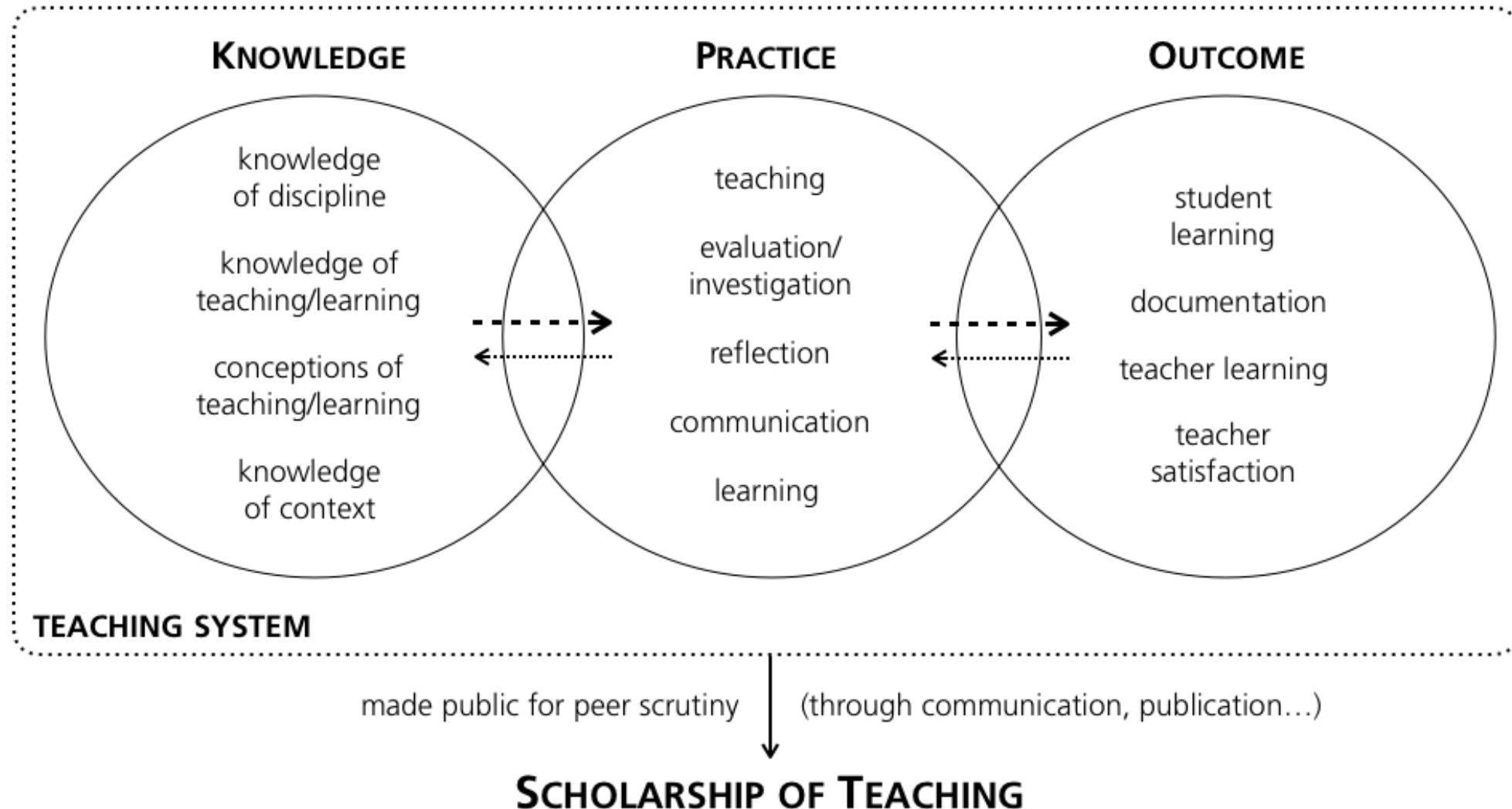
Community 2 – EPC Community

Membership	Approx. 50 members by invitation Members aligned to EPC academic career pathway
Genesis	Started in late 2019
<i>Modus operandi</i>	Support for education focused academics Six meetings per year Talks and discussion with successful senior education colleagues, journal editors, funding bodies Membership stable, although attendance was variable
Desirable outcomes	Build confidence Increase success of EPC promotion applications Enhance quantity & quality of SoTL outputs

Theoretical frameworks



Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.



Trigwell, K. and Shale, S. (2004). Student learning and the scholarship of university teaching. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(4), 523-536.

Methods

- **Online survey** provided to both groups
- Based on both Wenger and Trigwell & Shale concepts (i.e. 'communities' & 'learning')
- Ethical approval meant we couldn't promote → low response
- Follow up **Focus Group** (with two members who were both part of both communities)
- **Convenor reflections**

We are interested in staff **perceptions of the Faculty 'Educational Escapes'** (EE) group, exploring how it has functioned as a community of academics and also its role in enhancing scholarship of learning and teaching ('SoTL'). We are interpreting SoTL as education-focused activities that are intended to enhance educational outcomes by changing academic practices or scholarly outputs. We are collating the anonymised survey results for a presentation at the EuroSoTL conference in Manchester in June 2022.

Q1. Please describe how, if at all, Educational Escapes sessions:

- enhanced your **knowledge** of SoTL.
- influenced your **educational practices**.
- (could have) improved **learning and satisfaction** of you and/or your students.

Q2. Are there any ways that Educational Escapes:

- positioned you as part of a group of colleagues with **similar SoTL interests**?
- catalysed **SoTL-focused interactions** (including discussions in or after sessions)?
- linked to **SoTL outcomes/outputs** (e.g. tools, resources, projects)?

Q3. Any further comments (e.g. suggestions for improvement, comparisons with other CoPs/arenas in which you develop SoTL)?

Q4 Approximately how many Education Escapes sessions have you attended

Q5 Overall, how would you rate the value of Educational Escapes:

- in terms of catalysing your SoTL practice?
- In terms of stimulating an active community of colleagues?

0 (not at all) – 10 (a highly significant extent)

Our insights – Education Escapes

- More of a place to learn from speakers '**more Trigwell and less Wenger**'
- '**Shallow level**' of community. Different people attend different sessions, are building knowledge but within a '**looser/baggier**' community
- **Missed opportunity** of dealing with 'sizzling hot' issues as topics set a year in advance. For example, Covid impact on assessments
- **Planned rather than spontaneous** as the need to attract speakers, attract wider range of people and throwing net wider imposed constraints.
- Tension between tight community building around hot topics and being **inclusive with broad appeal** across Faculty.
- Ended up **delivering an executive aligned agenda** of how to make most of the new building development.
- Common across many former LTA communities – **starts innovatively, gains momentum (community) BUT becomes a servant** to institutional priorities.

Our insights – EPC Community

- This initiative is needed, but needs more consideration - ‘**scaffolding**’ and perceptions of ‘*how **we** are valued*’
- The group needed more of a sense of being an **active** community, doing stuff together “*Enjoyable - it feels like a good book club, go away read books and then (mostly same people) talk about them*”
- Made progress around members’ career paths, due to **exposure** to people who have “run it or done it”
- **Next step** is time spent together in a ‘nice space’, working together to produce outputs (e.g. promotion apps, pedagogical etc.)
- **Guerrilla approach** “*let’s do it anyway*”

Wenger

Trigwell & Shale

	EE	EPC
Domain (<u>identity</u> , defined, shared interests)	'Ish' But... loose and expectations vary and are high for some	Yes But... selected membership and focus on understanding what is required to progress
Community (<u>joint</u> activities sharing/caring/learning together)	'Ish' <u>But..</u> only for some, infrequent, certainly not for all, core group already linked through other fora	Not yet But... plans to run writing retreats (EPC promotion apps, research articles, PSF etc)
Practice (<u>shared</u> experiences, practices, resources)	Yes But... didactic, largely driven by speaker	Not yet Some around EPC promotion applications
Knowledge (<u>of</u> T&L, discipline, context)	Yes But... depends on speakers, could be 'hotter topics', high expectations from experienced participants	Yes But specific to Prof/Reader applications and some other work (narrow)
Practice (<u>evaluation</u> , reflection, learning)	'Ish' But... mostly speaker-driven with some reflections (a bit forced?)	Not yet Not part of the agenda
Output (<u>learning</u> , documentation, satisfaction)	'Ish' But... some exemplars when aligned to executive agendas	Yes But <u>again</u> narrow around the Prof/Reader apps (future writing workshops to enhance)

Your reflections and experiences of similar groups and communities

Consider from two perspectives:

1. As a **community** of people (CoP)
2. As a **place to learn** (e.g. professional dev, external speakers, innovations etc)

And finally, how do you evaluate their success?

