

Doing Research

GEG7120 Geographical Thought and Practice

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Session aims & structure

Aims are **twofold**:

- Consider 'community of practice' concept & its development
- Explore how this helps define ourselves as researchers & research we do

Session structure:

1. Outline what is meant by 'community of practice' & review through examples
2. Consider three questions in groups
 - What ideas, concepts or theories have inspired you?
 - How has this changed your perspective / understanding of potential dissertation themes?
 - How do you define yourself as a researcher & who is your community of practice?

Identifying a 'community of practice'

Amin & Roberts 2008

Concept originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991):

- Anthropologists interested in **situated** learning & knowledge formation (e.g., midwives, tailors, naval quartermasters, meat cutters, non-drinking alcoholics)
- identified relationships shared by groups that were intrinsic to production of knowledge & defined 'communities of practice':

“a system of relationships between people, activities, and the world; developing with time, and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice”

Lave and Wenger (1991, p.98)

Development of concept

Anyidoho 2010

Subsequently developed in wide-ranging, multi-disciplinary literature (see Amin & Roberts 2008)

- Groups united by skills or tasks = rich source of knowledge formation
- Emphasise **situatedness** & association with dimensions of '**community**', e.g., Wenger (1998):
 - Mutual engagement i.e., resources (trust, reciprocity, and strong networks) promoting interaction
 - Shared/joint enterprise i.e., interconnectedness built around working on shared endeavour, problem etcetera
 - Shared repertoire of resources i.e., a “deposit of knowledge and norms” and shared meaning
- Everts (2015) situatedness doesn't mean being co-located, i.e., no requirement to be in same place

Characteristics of 'communities of practice'

Amin & Roberts 2006

Table 1 Key Characteristics of a Community of Practice

- Sustained mutual relationships — harmonious or conflictual
- Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
- The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
- Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
- Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
- Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
- Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
- Mutually defining identities
- The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
- Specific tools, representations, and other artefacts
- Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
- Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
- Certain styles recognised as displaying membership
- A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world

Source: compiled from Wenger (1998, pp. 125-6).

Working with 'community of practice'

Concept **problematised**, e.g. Amin & Roberts (2008)

- original emphasis lost as CoP thinking proliferates & concept instrumentalised
- argue for typologies of CoP, reflecting different varieties of 'knowing in action'

Yet CoP mobilised in wide-range of interdisciplinary research, e.g.

- Anyidoho 2010 – explores relevance to participatory development research
- Jones & Murphy 2011 – consider CoP as a dimension of the turn to practice-related research in economic geography
- Everts 2015 – considers how non-human life helps constitute human communities of practice (e.g., pathogenic organisms)
- Finn et al. 2022 – identify multiple CoPs organised around geography research groups / HE & secondary education

So can be focus *for* research: however, may also help to situate **ourselves** within communities of practice?

Identifying a 'community of practice'

“groups 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 interaction on an on-going basis”

Wenger et al. (2002, p.4)

Domain - “A community of practice ... has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest”

Community - “In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information.”

Practice - “[S]hared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice”

Academic 'communities of practice'

Jawitz 2009

“Academic identity is viewed as both distinctively **‘individual and embedded in the communities of primary importance to them’** (Henkel 2000, 251)”

“The **discipline** is the central context within which ‘academics construct their identities, their values, the knowledge base of their work, their modes of working and their self esteem’ (Henkel 2000, 22)”

“[The discipline] is the **place** where ‘a sense of academic identity flourishes’ (Kogan 2000, 209)”

So: we have ‘domain’, ‘community’ & ‘practice’

Academic
'communities
of practice'

e.g., food
justice CoP

Reynolds et al. 2020

Example: Food Justice Scholar-Activist/Activist-Scholar
CoP

Read section on the origins and evolution of the FJSAAS
CoP (pages 281-282). Consider following questions as
you read:

1. What are the domain/s associated with the FJSAAS
CoP?
2. How would you describe the community? Who is
identified as being a part of the CoP?
3. What practices would you identify as being central
to the formation / maintenance of the CoP?

Question: What does this reveal about how academic
identities are (perhaps) made & shaped through CoPs?

Building *your* academic identity

Asked to reflect on three questions:

1. Has anything you have heard in the lectures or read in relation to them really sparked your interest?
2. Has a concept, construct, or theory changed the way that you think about the topic you are considering for your dissertation? If so, which one and how?
3. How would you define yourself as a researcher? For example, what are your theoretical interests / methodological preferences?

Task 1

15 mins

Task 2

15 mins

- Divide into small groups (3/4); preferably people you don't usually work with
- Discuss your answers to questions 1-3, sharing your ideas however emergent they are
- How do your answers to questions 1-3 help to identify your community of practice?
- What would you do to embed yourself in the community / communities most important to you?

Wrap up

Is the 'Communities of Practice' concept helpful? If so, how?

- Aligning theoretical / thematic interests with disciplinary perspectives?
- Identifying how theory and method align and how it relates to CoPs?
- Identifying who the broader communities are that we wish to engage with? (e.g., FJSAAS)

Main aims:

1. Encourage you to start thinking about these questions
2. Recognise dissertations not just independent research, about entering into a discussion

References

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