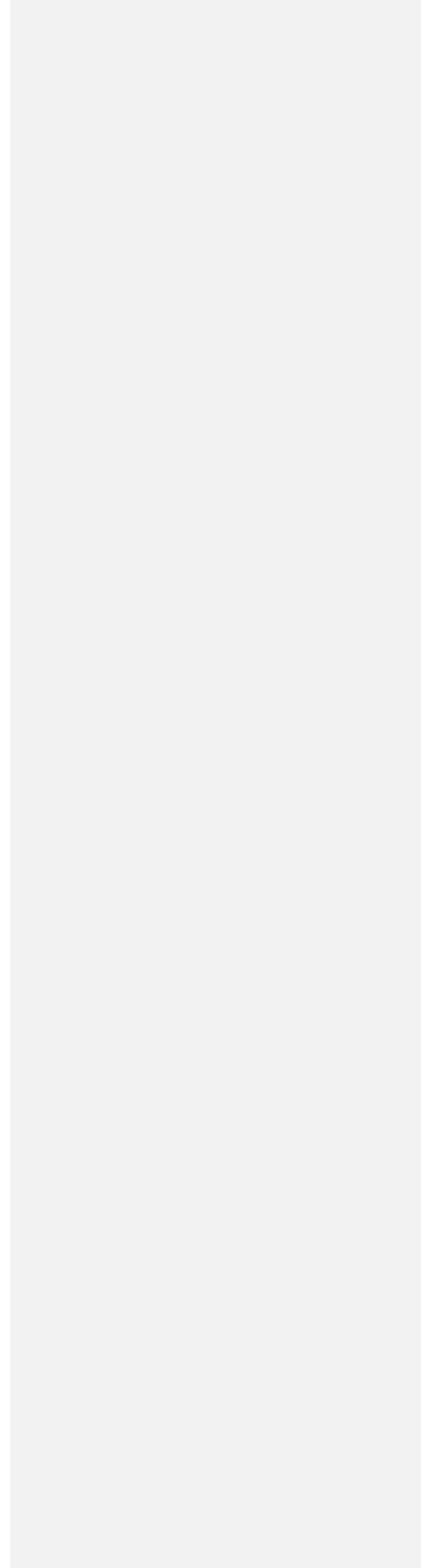


Blaiklock Journal 1

Communities of Practice Journal
David Blaiklock
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Journal 1

I found Erin Peters presentation to be excellent in that she presented a well-balanced lecture that combined useful doctoral information with good life stories. I have always fond this to be a desirable presentation technique and it is one that I hope to achieve some day. What I found most fascinating about her lecture was the concept of self-regulation amongst science students in that her model was focused on middle school students teaching themselves. This is a great approach that can be applied to a range of students from young learners to graduate students. Once a learner gains the ability to teach themselves a specific concept, they will be able to collaborate with others in gaining a further understanding or teaching them that concept. This helps begin an informal community of practice where learners are looking for answers and relying on each other to develop solutions.

The second thing I appreciated from Erin's lecture was her explanation of her mixed method approach. I have always thought that the only valid research came from quantitative designs and that qualitative approaches did not have a place in science. After hearing Erin, I realized the importance of qualitative measures in that they can help explain phenomenon that occur within a quantitative design. I am looking forward to learning more about qualitative measures and have gained an appreciation for the mixed methods approach.

I have put forth a little thought to my dissertation and was appreciative of the advice in using the Venn diagram. The ideas I have had may not be very well researched and I was optimistic in hearing how Erin was able to create the case for her innovative idea. Her approach of finding as much research as possible on existing concepts and then synthesizing the information was very helpful and I plan to incorporate it into papers and my dissertation.

I also enjoyed Kelly Regan's lecture and gained a lot of insight into the life of a university professor. Prior to the lecture, my impression was that professors spent the majority of their time doing research. I did not realize the other facets of their position to include the budget & business and governance issues she discussed. I also appreciated her comments on competition and collaboration in that professors work together but also set the standards for each other in the quality of work. I believe this case is also true for doctoral students. Her comments on not getting all of the skills necessary to work at a university from writing a dissertation were very eye opening as I entered the class with the impression that it would prepare one for that lifestyle.

Finally, I gained a lot from Erin and Kelly in what they had to say about collaboration and finding ways to work with others. Erin's comments about knocking on doors to network and develop relationships will be very helpful and have led me to reach out to a professor in whose work I am interested. Kelly and Erin made excellent points about working with others and finding other experts in the field with whom to work on and develop different research projects. It would seem that engaging in these communities of practice makes it easier to conduct research

and publish. Utilizing the skills and resources of others will help impact the field of interest while growing the base of knowledge within it. Working with others to develop grants and find funding increases the ability to obtain it and feedback helps provide clues as to where to make changes and modifications in research strategy to make it more acceptable in the educational community.

Journal 2

Margo Mastropieri's lecture helped me realize the high level of detail and intricate relationships that can exist when running a study both in collaboration with another university but also the challenges that are faced in running a study in a public school setting. I appreciated what she had to say about the benefits of collaborating with another university in that there is an advantage in the collective process of learning by utilizing the knowledge of more people. This is the antithesis of what we have been learning in Ways of Knowing from Descartes perspective in that he believes that there is a greater benefit if only one person works alone. Using a larger group of people allows the entire team to draw on a multitude of experiences as they are designing the study. This sort of Community of Practice allows the group to collaborate in a manner that they are able to share knowledge and experience to advance their field. Likewise, both the Penn State team and the GMU team then had to collaborate with the particular schools with whom they were working. This required them to learn the rules of two existing Communities of Practice (the schools) and make sure that they conform to the rules of their existing Community of Practice (GMU and Penn State). I also learned the benefit of a design study in that it allows a researcher to perfect a technique before actually testing it. This is very beneficial as one may abandon a method that is on the right path based on the results it produces. By having the ability to adjust the method along the way, the technique can be perfected and then its effectiveness can be tested. The publication of this method may allow other researchers from other universities to become involved with the study.

Rick Brigham's lecture helped me realize that a researcher can cross disciplines quite a bit and does not necessarily have to stay within their own field. The eye-gazing software that was developed in collaboration with the engineering department at the University of Virginia demonstrates a different kind of Community of Practice in that two very different fields were working on different parts of a project that had a variety of uses. The Community of Practice focused on the development of the device and software and while each person brought a different set of knowledge to the project, they were all able to work together to create a final product. That final product has a myriad of applications that may expand that Community of Practice to other disciplines that may be interested in adapting it for their purposes.

Overall the special education field as a whole borrows from a lot of different areas. In addition to the content area they need to learn, they also need specialized techniques in both instruction and behavior management for the children to succeed. The types of technology that are available can help students but unfortunately most mechanical engineers/software designers

lack the knowledge about both the needs of the field and how the student learns to be able to develop the appropriate equipment. Likewise, most teachers lack the skills that the aforementioned group have to design effective equipment. This means that both groups must work together in order to develop these sort of tools. The university setting allows for these techniques to be researched and tested so that information can be disseminated on effective tools for special education learning.

Journal 3

Last night, we learned about how policy can create and influence a variety of communities of practice. In particular, there is a community of practice that exists on the local, state, national, and international level that each abides to its own rules and ways of doing things. As one progresses up this continuum, the rules for the community of practice become more and more complex as one is dealing with more systems working together in the community.

One of the quotes that stood out to me was that being an educator is being a good community member. This rang true to me as I have entered this field with the hope of improving the lives of others and changing the world. I had already chosen Education Policy as a major prior to this class and had already met with Penny Earley to be my advisor. However, this lecture helped me realize how many different communities have to interact with each other in order for policy to be researched and drafted. In particular, I realized that the organization that is giving you a grant and funding your research does so with the hope that the research you are doing will influence policy in their favor. This brings into question a variety of issues about ethics which may or not be addressed through other policy. The end result of what you are doing needs to be in favor of who is paying the bill in order to continue receiving funding from that source. Researchers need to make sure they maintain objectivity in their work when they are dealing with these sorts of issues.

Two of the most interesting things I found was when a legislator had contacted Dr. Anderson asking him about his research. This is an example of one community of practice (government) working with another community of practice (university research) to reach a common goal. I had realized before that a lot of what lobbyists do is bridge the gap between these two different communities but I found it interesting that the legislator would contact the researcher directly. The other interesting thing I found with Dr. Anderson was that he had worked with such folks as Nickelodeon in trying to get the message out. He seems very interested in trying to disseminate his information as broadly as possible so that his message is received. The techniques he is using in mass media allows him to reach a huge audience that will continue to grow as he works with different communities of practice.

The last two points that stood out to me was when Dr. Anderson talked about 25 different colleges coming together to create standards as their own community of practice that would not be adopted by the president's of the university. It made me realize that even the best policy that

is supported by the best research may not be acceptable by another community as it may make them look unpopular or unfavorable within their community. While trying to reduce alcohol on consumption on campus may be a good idea, the presidents may not agree with that policy as there is a rite of passage associated with it. The policy may make the university look different to some students causing them to not want to attend. Finally, Penny's comments about how communities of practice come together and focus on only one issue was very interesting. It made me think of group dynamics and I listened closely to what she had to see about the importance of changing community members to bring in fresh thoughts and to increase the variety of opinions. I recently read What Happened by Scott McClellan and one of the things he faults the Bush administration for (of the many) was failing to turn over his staff at the reelection. This prevented new ideas from entering the administration and made it such that the concepts were inbreeding amongst themselves. This made me realize why universities tend to hire professors who got their doctorates at other universities, so that new ideas can come in. Penny made me realize the importance of who you choose to be in a community and to focus on the goals of that particular community when it comes to policy. Her article made me realize the importance of communities of practice for people who are new in their field and made me think about creating a facebook group for the new doctoral students at GMU that we could use to support each other.

Journal 4

Dr. Ndura's lecture made me realize how many different Communities there are in the world. The two tribes in Burundi who were at war were each their own Community and their conflict stemmed from a disagreement that led to hatred. Nonetheless, each tribe had its own characteristics, beliefs and values that they felt were very important. However, their failure to see the ideals of a different Community is potentially what led to the conflict between the two tribes. Dr. Ndura's lecture described the use of many different Communtties in African culture that helped her be able to succeed. The local Community helped her get to and from school so that she could gain an education. However, the school Community was different from her village Community in that the education was based on a traditional French one that used stories and concepts from French history. The education she received was not based in Burundi culture and therefore it was inconsistent with her community village.

As she advanced in her career, she wanted to be a part of certain Communities but because of both her gender and her tribe, she was not allowed easy entry. She struggled during her university education because the dominant Community of the time looked down on her as inferior. Therefore, she had to work much harder to succeed and was never able to establish herself as an equal with the dominant Community just because of her tribal origin. She risked quite a bit by leaving the country and continuing her education in England where she was exposed to a Community that appreciated her and wanted to keep her as a member after her studies were done. Even in her time in America, she had to keep working to prove herself in this Community and she always strived for excellence. Once she was able to establish herself as the

intelligent researcher she is, she was able to branch out into other Communities to advance her project. In particular she has worked very hard with her former Community in Burundi to improve the schools there. She has taken the experience she has had in the American Community, blended it with her experience with the Burundi educational Community, and worked at forming relationships to form a Community of international educators who are working towards an education model in Burundi that is better than the one she experienced.

Dr. Norton's lecture was interesting in that she is using the online community to help people network and change the model of the traditional university environment. Using design studies, she has been able to look at alternative means of university learning to help facilitate an education for students who do not live near a university. For the most part, she has attempted to develop a virtual Community of Practice where one professor will have the ability to teach many students at once in a nonlecture format. This helps students form their own Communities to help them learn from each other rather than through the traditional means of sitting in a lecture for their education.

Journal 5

Dr. Shaklee and her panel gave a very interesting presentation that covered a variety of issues dealing with multicultural education. I found the FASTTrain program to be particularly interesting as it allows others to gain certification within the context of another culture. It must have quite an experience to be teaching in a one room schoolhouse in Kenya while trying to get certification at the same time. From my own perspective, I came to realize how fortunate I was in my own teacher training. While I may have been learning as I was doing, I had the fortune of being at least somewhat familiar with the culture of the students I was teaching. I was also reminded of a woman I met while on my way back from Fiji. She went there every year at a discounted rate in exchange for teaching in their schools. I always thought this would be an outstanding opportunity to have the chance to learn another culture through teaching in their schools. However, it would be very challenging as I would have to make sure that I did not offend anyone with my beliefs. I would have to engage others who were familiar with the culture to learn about any taboo topics. In this practice, I would be engaging a cultural community of practice that would allow me to learn.

Comment [j1]: Insightful self-reflection

Throughout the evening, I wondered about the issues the Pakistani teachers faced as they were being trained in the context of our culture. It must have been challenging for them to travel to another country to learn about educational practices. I was curious if there was any debriefing process through which that sort of information could be obtained. It would be interesting to know what practices we taught them might not have been effective within the context of their culture. Nonetheless, I was happy to see the two communities coming together to share in the educational experience.

Overall, I was impressed with the different countries coming together in an attempt to develop an international framework for equity. I believe this to be very important in developing an international community of practice in education. In order for equity to truly exist in the world, there must be an ample education opportunity for everyone. A friend of mine who is in the military once told me that the literacy rate in Afghanistan is extremely low. This is the sort of issue that would make it easy for a corrupt leader to take charge as the lack of an education prevents the population from learning how to appropriately question what is happening and how it relates to the ways that other governments are doing things. Education also allows for more opportunities which will allow for economies to grow.

Journal 6

Dr. White and Dr. Fox gave an impressive presentation about the cohort learning model. Of particular interest was the study of each student's ability to think critically throughout their participation in the cohort. The cohort model was used to analyze how students learned about their own learning. This study has the ability to spread the word to the teacher education community of practice of the efficacy of the cohort educational model. This lecture came at an interesting time when we were also reading Bruner in our Ways of Knowing class. The ideas of both agency and self-reflection were top of mind as Dr. White and Dr. Fox gave their lecture.

From my own perspective, I obtained my master's degree through a cohort model. This allowed a group of students from different programs to come together and learn. Rather than having a few classes here and there with this group, the majority of us went through the entire program together which allowed us to develop relationships with each other. This added to the learning experience when it came to any group projects or assignments within the class. We were able to learn from each other and form our own community of practice. We were then able to take what we learned back to our individual programs and implement it as we saw fit. Within our particular community, there was diversity in the types of students we worked with, grades taught, and level of service provided. This diversity of the group only enriched the education we received and as we worked on different projects, we were able to see where the other people were coming from in the suggestions they made. Most importantly, the cohort allowed us to bring either what we learned from the professor or from each other back into our own programs that would occasionally change the status quo. It has been my experience that many educators easily get stuck in a rut of what they think will work and therefore do not seek out change very often. The involvement in the cohort allowed a small group of us to bring revolutionary practices into our program to help ensure that the best evidence based practice was being employed. We were able to develop ideas in one community of practice that we could implement in another community of practice. This relationship had the potential to go both ways as things we learned about in our programs could be discussed as part of class projects. Our involvement in the cohort made us agents of change within our workplaces.

Comment [ji2]: This entry coherently puts together the panelists' ideas and seriously relates them to your own growth as a leader and a doctoral student.

The other key concept I took away from the lecture by Dr. Fox and Dr. White was the magnitude of the types of research that the CEHD was doing for both the short term and long term. I was very impressed by learning about the development of this project and the length of time for which it had run. The different studies that have spun off from this one and the information that will be presented is very innovative and will be very good for the reputation of the university. Through this innovative approach, GMU will establish itself as a leader within its own Communities of Practice.

Comment [j13]: This entry demonstrates your evaluation of two key ideas as they relate to your own growth. Answers the "so what" question.

Journal 7

I found the lecture on publication and the different types of research studies to be very informative. In particular, the steps of how to get published were very helpful. I had always wondered if it was possible to publish an article on more than one journal and I was able to learn why that would not work. I also enjoyed learning about how different journals were specific to the types of articles and subject matter that they published. One of the thoughts I had while listening to the lecture was that there are those of us in the field who dedicate our time to research in regards to reading journals, conducting experiments, and publishing, and those of us in the field who are so busy engaged in the practices associated with the field that it is difficult to find time to read journals. I realized that it would be helpful to have some sort of journal digest to bridge this gap between researchers and practitioners. Practitioners could read the digests and if there was a specific article they found interesting, they could then look up the entire article and implement the concept in their daily practice.

I also found the questions of What, So What, Who Cares, and What's New to be helpful in framing research questions. As a student who will consider publishing before obtaining my doctorate, this was a simple guide to be able to frame a research question and write about what I found. Combining this information with the how to get published lecture provided useful tools for engaging in this process.

Finally, the lecture on qualitative research was very enlightening. My own opinion of qualitative research was very poor before listening to the lecture which made me realize that I was simply misinformed. I had not previously realized the dynamics associated with it in that you are not only able to measure and effect on a group but the details of that effect and how it impacted each person. Being able to see the exact context of the effect provides a higher level of precision in research that could take years to obtain through purely quantitative methods.

All of these ideas were very helpful in thinking about how to engage a Community of Practice. By conducting well-formed, precise research that is published, we are able to establish certain truths for our community to use. These truths can either be implemented into practice by the practitioners or serve as a springboard from which other research can be conducted. The qualitative approach helps open the door for future quantitative studies by providing detailed information about the effects of a treatment on specific individuals. This effect can then be

studied on a larger scale through a quantitative method. Conducting research and publishing is the biggest contribution one can make to a Community of Practice in that they are establishing truth and disseminating it throughout the community for further study and **implementation**.

Comment [j14]: Your entries continue to reflect high levels of analysis and synthesis.

Journal 8

Meeting with the different doctoral students was very helpful as they had some very good advice to give. Above all, it was good to hear about their journeys through the program and to hear that it is possible to achieve while working full time. The advice on looking for a graduate research assistant position was very helpful as it allows access to things I would not typically have access to such as the community to which the sponsoring professor belongs. It is also a position where I could learn a lot about the research process from proposal to publication so that I am able to engage in that practice myself. In addition, the relationship that would be gained by becoming a graduate research assistant would help expand my own community and network for future research projects.

It was also useful to learn about how to work with different professors in developing both the program committee and the dissertation committee. When they spoke about identifying which professors work best together it brought me back to my initial meeting with Penny Earley where as my advisor she indicated that she could identify who gets along with who in forming my committee. Having a committee that works well together creates my own community of support as I develop my program and embark on the voyage it entails. The option of changing the committee at dissertation was also very helpful in that there may be a better fit for the type of research you intend to do. The fact that no one gets upset if you do not choose them was one I had already learned when I met with Dr. Bemak about being on my committee and we realized that it would not be a good match. The analogy of finding three people that will each bring a piece to the puzzle was also helpful.

The doctoral students' discussion of the portfolio was also very helpful. While this was mentioned during orientation, the discussion of it class made it much more real. I sat and calculated in my head when I would need to present my first portfolio and realized that I needed to get my act together as the pace I was moving at would require me to have it done by the fall semester.

Finally, I was very impressed with Kevin McGowan's ability to bridge the relationship between GMU and his Head Start program. There is a lot of good research and practice occurring at GMU and I have often tried to think of ways to bridge the relationship with my own work community. Bringing these two communities together would be a mutually beneficial relationship where each can learn from the other. As I have been reading the articles for this class I have wondered about the best way to incorporate them into my work environment in the hopes that my coworkers would not be resistant to change. I work in a unique environment where different strategies could be attempted to advance the field of special education with a

variety of different populations. Perhaps I should contact Kevin to discuss the steps he took to make that happen.

Comment [ji5]: Please do. Start your own CoP and network to meet your needs.

Journal 9

The presentation by Kidd, Burns, and Nasser was very interesting in regards to the manner in which they will work with teachers on their continuing education needs. This is a better model than the typical seminars that are offered where you learn the same thing over and over again and there is always a member of the audience who asks questions with obvious answers. It is also very good that they will be targeting assistant teachers as they tend to have little formal training in how to engage in best practices and this program will help them with that. This is an excellent formal model for working with teachers on enhancing their skills and engaging in best practices.

From my own experience as a classroom teacher, there was a wide range of things that were attempted to be taught but between behavioral management techniques and academics, there was very little consistency in what was being taught and there was no formal model for how it was being taught. I believe the STEP program would be very beneficial to my current school as it helps teachers develop skills in different areas. While reading is the one they are currently starting with, it can be applied to any skill that is being taught in the classroom. The LEARN model is especially helpful as it gives the opportunity for feedback and evaluation of the techniques being used.

Professional development as a whole can be very challenging to obtain for both a teacher and an assistant teacher. There are many programs out there but it is difficult to determine which ones are worthwhile. Academic staff have a limited amount of time they can be away and it would be a shame to waste it on an ineffective or inappropriate workshop. I know I have had the experience where I took a day away from my students to spend time in a workshop that was not worthwhile. By developing a program like the STEP program, schools can target the staff who will benefit from it and use it as a model to grow their staff. The idea of breaking a large group into smaller groups is appealing as teachers tend to learn better from interactive/hands-on instruction.

Most importantly, from my perspective, the STEP model teaches schools how to develop their own communities of practice within their building. The N of the LEARN model deals with networking with other people. This model for sharing practices is consistent with the narrative inquiry models that I have learned about in Ways of Knowing. By reflecting on different strategies and sharing those reflections with others, we are able to refine them so that we can develop effective strategies for the specific context in which we work.

Finally, it was very interesting to see these three women come together for this project. They each had a different background and brought something unique to the table. It was similar to the previous week's discussion of forming a dissertation committee based on the pieces you need for

the puzzle. These three women came together as the puzzle to form their own small community to benefit the field at large.

Comment [ji6]: Well stated.

Journal 10

Dr. Zenkov's presentation was fascinating in the work he was able to do with inner city youth in Cleveland. I have worked with similar populations of children and have experienced the lack of motivation for academic success firsthand. The photography strategy he developed to unlock some of the reasons about why they were not motivated was incredible. He has developed a very interesting program that I would like to bring to my school. The school where I am currently working has very similar students and this would be a way for them to increase their motivation in school. He also came to realize that the students in his program had a lot of technology skills that adults did not. I have also found this to be true in my own work environment where students are able to find ways to bypass web filtering software. I am currently piloting a program that is designed to develop the skills of students in a manner that allows me to teach them but to also learn some of their own tricks so that we can improve the settings of our network and increase its security

There seemed to be many layers of communities of practice involved in Dr. Zenkov's project. He started with his own experience where there was little emphasis on school in his own family but he was able to find the motivation to obtain a doctorate. It appears that he accessed the community of his professional development school to find someone to partner with. I also went through a cohort for my Master's degree and continue to communicate with many of my fellow students in sharing ideas and discussing different projects we want to accomplish. He was also able to access the students' communities as well in that he wanted to work with them in their ability to help their peers in siblings. He was able to find the real personality of the kid underneath the touch exterior. I have shared this experience as well and there is often a heart of gold and a kid who wants to reach his potential once that exterior is taken down. Dr. Zenkov has found an extremely creative way to accomplish this task.

Dr. Barcher's lecture on grant writing was also very informative. I have had little experience in dealing with grants and his overview of the process was excellent. I learned to keep in mind that one needs to plan ahead and submit a grant at least 18 months in advance. This is helpful information for me as I have difficulty seeing that far in advance and I know that I will need to plan way ahead should I apply for a grant. The budget information was also very good in that I know I would not focus on the indirect costs as much as he emphasized you needed to. The marketing perspective on it was very useful as well. My wife is in that field and I am sure she will be a great resource for making sure it has the marketing edge when I write my first proposal. Finally, I took away the importance of relationship development in getting a grant. Once again it comes back to who you are engaged with in a community of practice in helping you get a grant. Having a good relationship with the sponsor can only be beneficial as they will know the type of work of which you are capable. The next day, I went online to search some of the grants on the

sites he mentioned and plan to try to find one that will help my school so that I can start practicing my grant writing skills and gain experience in this process.

David:

Your journal entries exceed expectations and demonstrate deep reflection, analysis, and synthesis. They are coherent and show how you are using your new information and reflection to impact your journey as a doctoral student.

A+