



Cultivating Communities of Practice in Autism

CoPA Conference
September 24, 2008



Communities of Practice in Autism

- CoPA is a collaborative grant funded by:
 - DMHMRSAS
 - The Integrated Training Collaborative
 - The VA Department of Education, Special Education Instructional Services



Mission

The Communities of Practice in Autism (CoPAs) will share knowledge and information about evidence-based strategies in natural environments, focusing on infants, toddlers, and young children with autism spectrum disorders and their families, to assist providers to improve services in the Commonwealth.



Issues

- Lack of knowledge
- Overlaps or gaps in services
- Don't know what to do
- Don't know what to say



Key outcomes

- o Share knowledge
- o Improve supports and services for all children with ASDs and their families
- o Develop a consistent mechanism to communicate individualized service delivery
- o Enhance families' confidence and competence
- o Address families' and providers' skills related to ASDs



The charge to CoPA leaders

- Hold 9 meetings based on the CoPA goals (September 2007-2008)
- Develop *local* CoPA goals based on the mission and *individual community issues and needs*
- Measure progress toward mission/ issues
- Develop a sustainability plan

CoPA Process

- Leaders were asked to consider
 - The issues surrounding service delivery for young children with ASD and their families in *their* community
 - Who to invite
 - Size of the CoPA
 - Meeting structure
 - Disseminating information
 - Communicate purpose of meetings
 - CoPAs were NOT intended to be structured monthly trainings or workshops
 - Their role as a facilitator
 - Delegate tasks

CoPA Supports

- Blog
- Meeting in February
- Challenges & solutions
 - My involvement

What is a Community of Practice (CoP)?

“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 interacting on an ongoing basis”

(Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002)

Business origins

- **Managing Knowledge**
 - **Xerox**
 - **Ben and Jerry's**
 - **Shell Oil**
 - **Hewlett-Packard**
 - **Colgate-Palmolive**
 - **Microsoft**
 - **Hallmark Cards**

Chrysler Corporation



CoPs are everywhere!

- Nurses
- Teachers
- Soccer moms and dads
- Gang members
- Frontline managers

What do participants do?

- Interact
 - Spend time together
 - Share information, insights, advice
 - Help each other solve problems
 - Discuss their situations, aspirations, needs
 - Ponder common issues, explore ideas, act as sounding boards

What do participants do?

- Develop relationships
- Develop a unique perspective on their topic
- Develop common knowledge, practices, & approaches
- Accumulate knowledge
 - Create tools, manuals, standards, generic designs, teaching strategies, resources
- **Share knowledge**

Why focus on CoPs?

- Knowledge management
 - Key to success
 - A valuable resource
 - Need to become more intentional and systematic about managing knowledge
- Knowledge is social
 - Requires multiple perspectives
 - Should take place within the context of culture of real situations (Lave & Wenger, 1991)
- CoPs: An approach to solving complex educational problems (NASDSE, 2007)

The many forms of CoPs

- Big or small
- Long- or short-lived
- Colocated or distributed
- Homogeneous or heterogeneous
- Spontaneous or intentional
- Unrecognized or institutionalized

Common to all CoPs

- Three fundamental elements
 - Domain
 - Knowledge, defines a set of issues
 - Community
 - People who care about the domain
 - Knowledge generators and knowledge consumers
 - Practice
 - Shared knowledge developed in order to be effective in the domain

*“It’s not about working harder,
it’s about working smarter.”*

Levels of participation

- Core members
- Active members
- Peripheral members
- Outsiders



Rather than force participation, successful communities “build benches” for those on the sidelines.





One year later

Your CoPA leaders share...

“groups of people

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about a topic,*

*and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this
area by interacting on an ongoing basis”*

(Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002)



References

- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2007). *Communities of practice: A new approach to solving complex educational problems*. <http://www.ideapartnership.org/documents/CoPGuide.pdf>
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W.M. (2002) *A guide to managing knowledge: Cultivating communities of practice*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.