

**An Early Childhood Education Faculty Community of Practice:
A Model for Guiding Change**

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Abstract: A “community of practice” has different realizations for different groups. While one group may envisage the term used for people who come together for monthly meetings, another might view it as a professional learning model. As defined by Wenger-Trayner E. et al. (2023), “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p.11). They suggest that, in many instances, members of a community of practice will share expertise. In this instance, a group of faculty and a researcher, from different post-secondary institutions across Canada, all with a passion for outdoor pedagogy and a desire to improve the curricula and teaching strategies, came together to explore how to connect knowledge in outdoor pedagogy to teaching practice and application with students. Through regular engagement as a community, a climate for social learning was established that contributed to participants engaging in collaborative learning. This resulted in participants increasing their knowledge about outdoor pedagogy, the development of skills for facilitating curriculum development, and of teaching strategies that illustrated taking new applied knowledge and theory and applying them in outdoor teaching settings with students. The group chose a community of practice model because of their shared a common passion and a desire to deepen their

knowledge of outdoor pedagogy research through engagement and interactions. This paper identifies the four key themes that evolved in the community of practice and how each theme contributed to the development of a model for guiding change in college environments and influenced how faculty engaged in new ways of teaching and learning with students.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Community of Practice, Faculty, Outdoor Pedagogy; Curricula

This action research study aims to illustrate the effectiveness of a community of practice as a tool for supporting faculty in advancing their knowledge and skills in curriculum development and teaching strategies related to outdoor pedagogy. By examining the dynamics and outcomes of such communities, the research highlights the intricate interplay between collaborative learning environments and the evolution of changes in teaching strategies, learning processes, and curriculum frameworks for outdoor pedagogy.

Central to this action research study is the recognition of communities of practice as catalysts for professional growth, knowledge exchange, and collective problem-solving within the curriculum domain of outdoor pedagogy (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023). By cultivating a collaborative ecosystem where college faculty and researchers converge to share insights, resources, and best practices, in this instance, the community of practice advanced an array of faculty skills and development processes that were influenced by diverse perspectives and experiential wisdom.

Publicly Funded Colleges in Canada

Most publicly funded colleges in Canada offer early childhood education (ECE) certificate, diploma, or degree programs that focus on training students to work in an array of ECE settings (Dietze & Cutler, 2020). Faculty teaching in ECE programs plays a critical role in shaping the values, perspectives, and approaches that students and graduates embrace and incorporate into their philosophy and practice (Damjanovic & Blank, 2018). Curriculum content and teaching and learning strategies used by faculty, influence the quality of the students' experience, their depth of learning, and the transfer of knowledge to practice.

Many research studies indicate childhood today is in a time of transition. Children are more sedentary now than they were in previous generations. An increased use of technology rather than engagement in active play means children today spend more time indoors than outdoors (Dietze & Kashin, 2019). Despite current research that suggests outdoor pedagogy has many positive influences on children's physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development, and their mental wellness (Boiling et al., 2019), children and adults in early learning and childcare programs spend a major part of their days indoors. One challenge of increasing outdoor pedagogy in early learning and childcare programs begins with the outdoor pedagogy competencies that college graduates bring to the workplace. Dietze and Cutler (2020) identified that less than 10% of college ECE programs have courses dedicated to outdoor pedagogy. Recognizing that college graduate competencies are directly aligned with curriculum, and with teaching and learning methods experienced in their programs and practicums, colleges, and their faculty play an important role in advancing outdoor pedagogy. Focusing on professional development models can provide insight into support for faculty in their teaching practice and in advancing outdoor pedagogy in college programs.

College faculty have limited access to professional development, due in part to budget constraints (Dietze & Cutler, 2020). Collaborative learning with other faculty, such as in a community of practice, is one such social professional development model that can provide support, encouragement, new knowledge and skills, and changes to philosophy and teaching

methods with participants. In this study, the community of practice provided a joint space of shared participation in situated and mutual learning among all members (Nicolini et al., 2022; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) indicated that “a community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Thus, exploring outdoor pedagogy became the curriculum content for the research study to examine a community of practice model as a practice for change.

A researcher at a college in western Canada set out to support ECE faculty in at least three colleges who were interested in expanding their knowledge and skills in outdoor pedagogy. The overarching intent for participating faculty was to be open to increasing their knowledge about current outdoor pedagogy research and to advocate for their colleges to change their program curriculum to include courses, teaching methods, and practicum experiences dedicated to outdoor pedagogy. Across Canada, increasing outdoor pedagogy in ECE programs is still new in many jurisdictions. This article shares how a community of practice experience with college faculty interested in changing their teaching and learning practice from a theory/lecture model to a theory/experiential model in outdoor pedagogy, supported new learning and practices. The community of practice members determined the importance of becoming observers, facilitators, and collaborators, and were empowered as a group to make their learning visible to other faculty interested in advancing outdoor pedagogy and utilizing new teaching methodologies. As Stooke (2012) indicates, program changes are often stressful. She suggests that “assuming a new professional identity is no mean accomplishment, and it takes time” (Stooke, 2012, p. 60). Faculty also require support from college administration.

Why a Community of Practice

A community of practice was chosen to reflect the learning lens originally proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991). True learning reflects the application of knowledge and new identity formation. In this case, the knowledge acquired through the community of practice reflects the infusion of outdoor pedagogy into every area of the curriculum and participants' identity as an outdoor play advocate. Competence develops through on-going engagement with faculty within the context of educating early childhood educators across Canada (Nicolini et al., 2022). This community of practice made up of college early childhood education faculty fit within the Wenger-Trayner E. et al. (2023) view of a social order characterized by participation in a shared problem (lack of outdoor pedagogy knowledge and skills in teaching college students outdoors), mutual participation, and a shared repertoire of outdoor pedagogy (Omidva et al., 2023).

One faculty from three post-secondary programs in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick were provided with course releases to engage in a three-year project aimed at increasing theory and application of outdoor pedagogy through weekly community of practice meetings. An interest in outdoor pedagogy quickly gained momentum in the first few months of the project, resulting in additional faculty from across Canada joining the meetings, reaching a consistent weekly cohort of ten participants. At the mid-point of the project, the researcher and participants were eager to identify if, why, and how the professional learning experience had empowered their practice. The group determined that changing teaching and learning practices requires internal and external support. They also recognized that the community of practice model established by the group offered a safe space and community in which discussions, strategies, vulnerabilities, and results could be shared. Having the support from the members of the community of practice provided participants with increased confidence to change their teaching and learning strategies from a predominately lecture-based environment to one where classes were moved outdoors and were grounded in experiential learning. Although the model has been developed to support college ECE faculty, there is merit in examining the model for other faculty groups interested in redesigning their teaching and learning models.

Literature Review

Faculty Development

A plethora of literature emphasizes the relationship of professional development and excellence in teaching, student learning, and student success. Research also suggests that having experienced faculty does not necessarily assure quality teaching (Patfield et al., 2022). In most colleges, faculty are hired for their subject expertise rather than their teaching experience (Dietze & Cutler, 2020). The art of teaching is learned over time, which has led many colleges to establish teaching and learning centers focused on helping faculty develop teaching skills. The types of support offered at teaching and learning centers take many forms, from one-on-one coaching, to group discussions, to workshops, and courses.

Many definitions characterize professional development. For example, Guskey (2002) describes professional development from an education lens as a “systematic effort to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students” (p. 381). He emphasizes that quality professional development must lead to a change in classroom practice and a change in attitudes for the experience to be classified as professional development. Despite faculty having access to diverse types of professional development, Mohr and Shelton (2017) suggest that many professional development experiences are “ineffective and wasteful more times than not because it has often been ad hoc, discontinuous, and unconnected to any plan for change” (p. 124). The disconnections and transference of new learning to practice is often limited, in part, because many faculty work in isolation from one another and have reduced opportunities for co-learning, co-investigating, and collective debates about if, why, and how new learning should influence program curriculum (Dietze & Kashin, 2019). Goldsmith (2021) identifies the need for college faculty development units to shift their thinking about professional development and the models used. Goldsmith advocates for faculty development programs to be well-designed and effectively implemented to promote vitality, collaboration, rejuvenation, and changes to practice. Further, the models should focus on “faculty-to-faculty, person-to-person professional development” (Goldsmith,

2021, p. 140). This means that colleges benefit from designing and implementing a variety of professional development options that reflect the needs of the audience for individuals and groups of faculty.

From a historical perspective, Hromalik et al. (2020) suggest that one-time professional development workshops have not led to changes in student learning outcomes or changes to faculty beliefs, values, or teaching and learning strategies. There are many reasons one-time workshops do not transfer to a change in practice. For example, social interactions have long been recognized as an important component of faculty learning and professional development (Benbow & Lee, 2018). Generally, workshops are not designed for intensive dialogue among participants. Bickerstaff and Cormier (2015) indicate that one gap in the workshop delivery model is that the focus becomes selling the idea or concept rather than examining the concept, and then discussing how to transfer the concept to the teaching and learning environment. Some of the most impactful professional development occurs when participants engage in active learning, coaching, mentoring, and reflection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Criticisms of one-time professional development workshops are not new. Lam (2021) and others advocated over two decades ago that some of the best professional development learning outcomes are gained from an ongoing learning model rather than the more common model of sporadic professional development workshops or conferences. Wynants and Dennis (2018) suggest that many faculty lack knowledge of diverse teaching methods and confidence to try new teaching methods that promote student engagement. They suggest, “For example, many faculty rely mainly on lecture-style delivery of course information and static readings...” (p.2), neglecting experiential teaching strategies, including interactive technology options available to promote active learning engagement. These criticisms and the lived experiences of the participants in this research project contributed to creating an ongoing and interactive community of practice model to make learning visible, rather than pursue a more traditional professional development path.

In this instance, we suggest that the ongoing learning from the community of practice experienced by faculty contributed to updating their knowledge and expertise, which ultimately

is transferred to curriculum and teaching practices. Faculty development models with a “collaborative inquiry” lens increase opportunities for faculty to identify problems, co-plan learning, co-experience learning and evaluation, interpret outcomes and determine what is next in the cycle of learning (Bailey et al., 2015; Schnellert & Butler, 2014). Professional development opportunities that are reflective of the interests of the participants and are co-created and customized for the group increase the transfer to practice (Walters et al., 2017).

The learning lens implicit in a community of practice model implies four assumptions (Nicolini et al., 2022). Learning is situated in everyday moments, is social, is about “becoming” and grounded in new identities (Nicolini et al., 2022, p. 16), and includes people in a variety of stages of career development. Lave and Wenger (1991) add this last assumption, in addition to access to “information, resources, and opportunities for participation” (p. 101) as a tenet to full membership. Competence and professional development occur through collaborative sharing of theory and practice. A lens of innovation for communities of practice may also support change making, improvements in practice, and transformative practice.

This applied action research highlights the three critical elements of a community of practice: a domain of the common interest in outdoor pedagogy, the joint sharing of literature, ideas, and practice in the formation of true community, and outdoor pedagogy practitioners (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The application of knowledge came through considering problem-solving the barriers to outdoor pedagogy, developing confidence in taking children and early childhood education students outdoors in all weather, and in recognizing gaps in competence of faculty and college administrators. The experience of weekly virtual meetings created a dynamic learning environment of knowledge, competence, confidence, and change.

This paper introduces a modification of the community of practice model that was developed by the participants of the action research project, as they reframed their knowledge about outdoor pedagogy and their design and delivery of curriculum in outdoor environments. Specifically, this paper describes how a community of practice, strongly rooted within an emergent, inquiry-based, curriculum philosophy, was developed from the cycle of inquiry, and

how participants learned from one another, including their interactions with colleagues about current and aspirational practices, their fears, and challenges about returning to work with children, and how a community of practice increased their competencies.

Faculty Professional Development Model

About the community of practice participants

The project began with three faculty members from different colleges and a lead researcher. The faculty members and the researcher were unknown to one another. Funding was provided to support faculty in having two course releases per semester to engage in the project. Faculty were required to attend weekly meetings, and in years two and three of the project, participate in returning to the field to work with children outdoors weekly in an early learning and childcare program in the community. They were required to design and implement outdoor experiences for all types of weather for children in early learning programs. As faculty at other colleges and universities and administrators from various agencies learned of the project, an additional five to eight members participated in the weekly meetings. In some instances, the lead researcher had a professional relationship with the administrators. The commonality was that all participants were interested in outdoor pedagogy.

Methodology

This qualitative study was completed as part of a research project funded by the Lawson Foundation and conducted in accordance with the ethical standards set out by the Government of Canada's Tri-Council Policy for the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to examine the tenets of a community of practice model that would support faculty and administrators in exploring, examining, and learning about outdoor pedagogy from a theoretical and application perspective. Through a blend of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the study endeavors to capture the nuanced insights and measurable impacts of these communities on curriculum design, implementation of the experiential application of knowledge, and refinement processes. This inquiry also sought to

provide actionable insights for faculty and others invested in fostering innovative and impactful professional development initiatives.

The participants examined research and then collectively determined what action they would take to transfer new knowledge to practice. In Gherardi et al., (1998) the authors present the foundational idea of a community of practice as linked to practice and viewed as “social processes through which it is sustained and perpetuated, and that learning takes place through the engagement in that practice” (p. 279). Thus, the learning is bound to a community and the practice sustains continuous conversations to deepen the learning.

Applying the Community of Practice Model

Initially, the lead researcher facilitated weekly, two-hour virtual meetings with the members of the community of practice. Then, when members were comfortable with the role, members of the community of practice led the meetings and acted at times as a coach. Each week included an agenda, assigned pre-readings, usually from research-based journals on outdoor pedagogy, and learning outcomes. There were guided discussions focused on the research, and there were presentations by participants within the community of practice or by guest speakers. The group determined a set framework for each meeting, which helped them to focus on the literature, topics, and how to potentially transfer the new learning to practice.

This more formal structure of a community of practice is present in Wenger’s (1998) work where the description of a community of practice revolves around a common approach to a practice. According to Wenger (1998) a community of practice involves, “a shared repertoire of words, tools, stories, symbols, and so on. This experience of shared identity, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire connects people even before their commonality is reflectively or discursively elaborated” (as cited in Nicolini et al., 2022, p.10). A common identity within early childhood education regarding outdoor pedagogy was important to establish and maintain to support the quality of practice modeled. In addition, reflective dialogue was included, and often a challenge was put forth to determine how to transfer theory to practice. Throughout the

process, participants maintained reflective journals and periodically made their learning visible to others through discussion posts, blogs, podcasts, and conference presentations. Blogs and podcasts were placed on a college website accessible to the public.

The members of the community of practice determined that the person guiding the group was much like a coach by presenting new research and perspectives to the group, and then listening, observing, and documenting interactions about the content presented. Using an inquiry-based process, it was important for this guiding person to challenge the status quo and current practices, and to examine with participants their perceived and real barriers that affected changes to practice. A safe environment was created that contributed to participants feeling supported and able to express their ideas and have their voices heard.

As the group asked questions, time would be made to follow-up on teachable moments. Teachable moments are identified as a specific pedagogical approach inviting the group into purposeful opportunities for learning (Hyun & Marshall, 2003). The safe environment became a space for participants to engage with and model a process of sense-making as innovative ideas were examined in a partnership of learning and practice (Miller & Szymusiak, 2021; Wagner & Ash, 1998). Documenting observations, understanding the fears and unique needs of participants, and identifying areas requiring further development, were foundational so that the weekly meetings had value and lead to new learning that would transfer to practice. Recognizing the importance of participants being able to potentially facilitate or coach communities of practice in their institutions further enhanced their learning on ways to create similar learning environments with faculty and community members.

Data Collection and Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected throughout the study. For this paper, the authors will focus on data related to how and why the community of practice empowered their personal and professional development and practice. To gain insight into what aspects of the community of practice had been beneficial and to acquire a deeper understanding

of the experience as empowering, participants were asked to individually respond to the four questions outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Questions about the Community of Practice

Questions
1. If the community of practice group has contributed to your learning about outdoor pedagogy, describe how and why this has occurred.
2. Describe if and how this learning experience differs from participating in workshops and conferences in relation to what you transfer to practice.
3. Discuss five key aspects of the weekly meetings that are influencing your knowledge about outdoor pedagogy.
4. What three recommendations would you make to others considering developing a community of practice and why?

The participants' responses were analyzed line-by-line by the lead researcher and a colleague at a local university. Then, the comments were combined into one document and presented to participants individually, and then collectively examined to determine themes that emerged. The group members identified four main themes: coaching and the change process, group facilitation, reciprocal relationships, and reflective practice. From the themes, the participants then created an overarching model of their experience, entitled *A model for guiding change: Collaborative Practice* as shown in Figure 1, that they felt reflected why and how this community of practice had supported them in guiding change within their post-secondary and administrative roles from both a theoretical and a teaching and learning lens.

Results

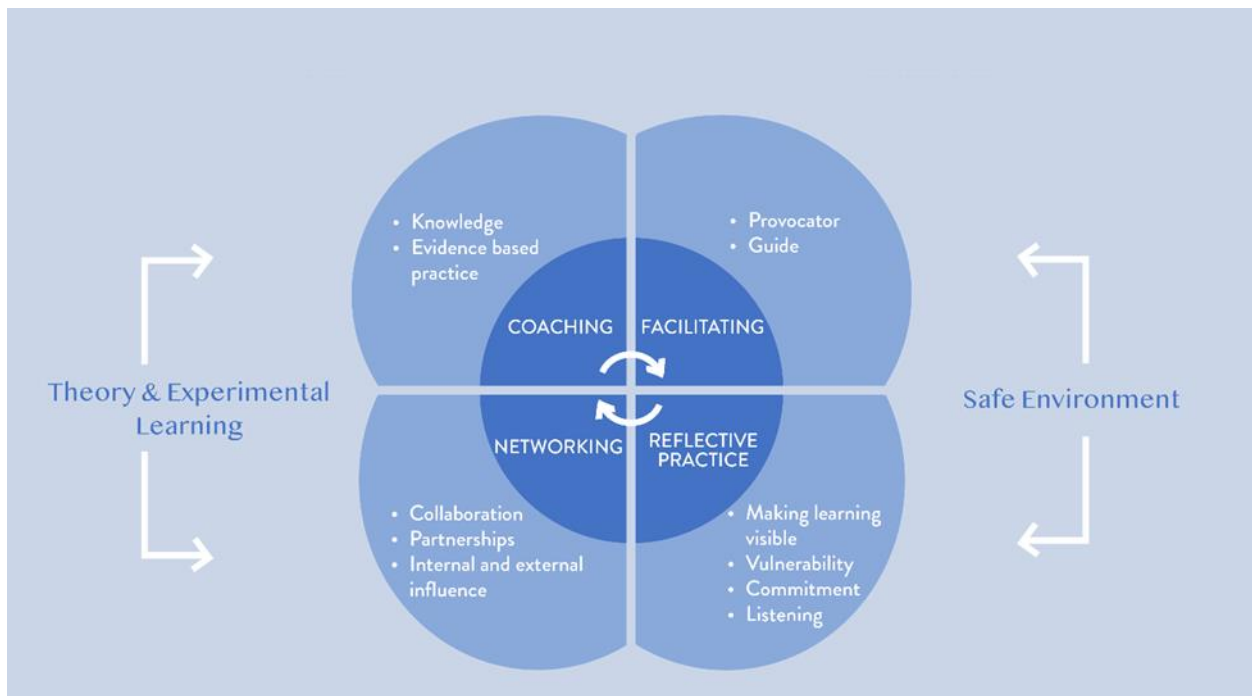
The results presented are derived from the themes identified from the four questions, combined with the participants' lived experiences of the community of practice that they determined had

empowered their values, philosophy, personal development, and teaching and learning practices.

All participants identified that they had engaged in an array of professional development offerings including conferences, workshops, and readings from specific journals. They agreed that, although all methods provide benefits to professional learning, this community of practice model clearly contributed to the new knowledge and learning being transferred to a change in practice. This finding aligns with the perspective of group learning presented by Bennett and Burrige (2018). The authors indicate that the most effective professional development models are ongoing, collaborative, interactive, and reflective of the needs of the participants. The key themes that guided the change in theory, and application of theory, to practice include the value of ongoing coaching, effective facilitation, a professional network with reciprocal relationships, and reflective practice. Each are described below.

Figure 1

A Model for Guiding Change: Collaborative Practice



As outlined in Figure 1, the model illustrates how faculty view the complexity of the types of support and action required when attempting to advance new knowledge and theoretical frameworks into practice. The participants recognized that the social learning occurring in this community of practice had great influence on feeling safe and influenced new ways of thinking and reflective practice.

Theme One: Coaching and change

The traditional professional development models used to support faculty in their teaching practice are generally hierarchical with a highly structured process (Orit, 2016). This community of practice model illustrates a non-hierarchical power dynamic. All participants are encouraged to share knowledge and practice in a collaborative and supportive environment. Within this understanding, the definition becomes more closely aligned to a coaching model, rather than the traditional mentorship model. As the project developed, the participants took on the role of the coach on a rotating basis for the purpose of deepening the discussions evolving from the research.

One participant suggested that coaching in a community of practice environment denotes a partnership with an active engagement and exchange of knowledge. She said, “Coaching promotes an opportunity to share, listen, challenge, and dialogue together around key topics of practice, policy, and change with respect to outdoor pedagogy.” Coaching plays an important role in supporting faculty development in the areas of teaching and innovation, scholarly development, and service. An effective coach outlines the intention and goals, the roles and responsibility of faculty members, and the purpose of the chosen model (Bloomberg, 2022). Another participant stated the need to “create a baseline around collective guiding principles of the community of practice so that the intent, accountability, and expectations are clear and agreed upon within the group.” This too aligns with the intent of a community of practice.

The key principles of a coach in a community of practice included a collaborative learning process through co-construction of learning, networking, developing teaching competencies and

knowledge, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Two participants made similar comments about the importance of coaches who contributed to the scholarship of teaching and learning through evidence-based practice and internal and external professional networks. They suggested that this builds confidence and contributes to understanding how individuals and groups might remove barriers to practice that inhibit opportunities to change so that practices reflect current research. When faculty are part of a safe environment that encourages them to take risks to change practices, it is a means to celebrate success and support them in disseminating the knowledge within and beyond their colleagues in the ECE department. Each participant embraced the opportunity to stretch co-participants beyond their comfort zone, within the safe space created by the group.

One participant indicated, “As a faculty member, I don’t necessarily need to examine research because up until this point, I relied on textbooks for my course resources. Having the opportunity to be introduced to how to find new research and to examine in-depth is key to staying current.” The participant maintained that the coaching received in examining research, and in distilling the research into her practice, provided her not only with expansion of her understanding of how to use research to inform practice, but also with the movement from knowledge and skills to practice. Another participant stated, “The readings build knowledge while the dialogue and discussion of best practice inspires innovation in pedagogy.” This helps identify how the new knowledge transfers to teaching and learning and to the early learning and childcare sector. Participants gained confidence in the first few months of the community of practice with the critical reflection on research and began to initiate sharing new articles and literature with group members as they took on the role of both coach and critical friend.

Theme 2: Group facilitation

All participants expressed the impact of disequilibrium within the context of a safe environment, where vulnerability was both welcomed and expected. Within a community of practice, one person takes on the role of a critical friend, willing to challenge the status quo of ideas (Curtis et al., 2013). The participants identified the importance of leadership, which brings out the shared knowledge of participants to deepen their understanding of best practice and group management. Participants recognized and valued the understanding that learning and change comes through discomfort, where ideas and practices can be challenged through critical reflection and dialogue. All participants indicated the importance of the coach creating a safe environment where all can contribute to advancing each other's learning and practice. One participant summarized the experience, "Within the collaborative community of practice, a culture exists where trial and error, risk-taking and hypothesizing are welcomed within a lens that is open and vulnerable." All participants expressed their delight in being uncomfortable. As stated by one member, "Monday mornings have become times to look forward to with delight and a bit of trepidation for the anticipated disruption coming our way." The discussions increased new ways of thinking and learning. As each participant took on the role of the coach, they gained experience in seeking out evidence-based literature, creating the context of a safe environment, and learning how to address the challenges or barriers to bring knowledge to practice.

Theme three: Reciprocal relationships

Within our context of increasing teaching and learning in virtual environments, a virtual community of practice provides an environment to share knowledge and resources, promote collegiality and collaboration, and facilitate reflective practice (Bloomberg, 2020). The participants in this community of practice became co-learners and committed to the goals of gaining knowledge about outdoor pedagogy to implement theory to practice. For example, one participant commented:

As a lifelong learner and reflective practitioner/educator/college faculty member, this opportunity has allowed me to engage in meaningful conversation with others who

see and appreciate value in ensuring that outdoor pedagogy is viewed, practiced, and researched through our ongoing and committed quality work with children, families, early learning professionals and post-secondary students.

Another participant indicated:

The sense of team has extended to a feeling of a larger togetherness in the field of early learning. The fact that our group extends across four provinces makes that easy; however, our workload and commitments sometimes lead to an insular and lonely feeling, especially this year during the pandemic. For me being part of this group has, to a degree, made my colleagues, by extension, feel part of this togetherness without even attending a meeting.

All participants identified that they felt the reciprocal relationships had stimulated them to want to learn more and to take risks to try new teaching and learning strategies.

Theme four: Reflective practice

In a constructivist approach to early childhood education, children construct their knowledge through the interaction of their ideas with others, and the adults provide the environment that builds upon children's existing knowledge and interests (Broderick & Hong, 2011). In the same way, critical reflection is a key principle of education dating back to the work of John Dewey (1956). Critical inquiry requires an active and persistent process (Dietze & Cutler, 2020). As a community of practice focused on outdoor pedagogy, the group examined research articles weekly, discussed applications to practice within each participants' faculty or program, and created disequilibrium through critical questions to provoke new perspectives that could lead to a change in practice. One participant indicated, "Within this community of practice, there is an equal and inclusive structure that sets the stage for invited collaboration and sharing amongst the group." The structure helps to inform goals, objectives, and personal learning journeys.

Meta-cognition is an agent of changing pedagogical practice among faculty. The scholarship of teaching and the use of storytelling in the community of practice in outdoor

pedagogy was documented through a variety of mediums, from blogs, to podcasts, to a pan-Canadian conference on outdoor pedagogy. As stated by one participant, “We are challenged to think differently and make that change real in our workplaces and this collaborative dialogue stimulates my learning in the moment.” Documentation of the learning of our community captures the breadth, depth, and impact of our learning, both within our own faculty groups, and beyond. As stated by Wien et al. (2011), documenting our learning journey through these narratives represents a means to make the journey visible to others, so the faculty’s dynamic and changing pedagogy becomes a part of a broader influence. Another participant identified that “the multimodal sharing that exists within this community of practice creates impact as we review photos, videos, and other resources to support making learning visible and, consequently, change some aspects of practice.” These experiences changed teaching and learning for the participants by reducing a lecture-format teaching process to one of experiential learning with students outdoors.

As the model illustrates, the collaborative approach that was embedded into the community of practice and hence the model presented, is more than a group of individuals meeting weekly. As a group interested in gaining new knowledge about outdoor pedagogy and in adjusting their teaching and learning delivery methods, learning from one another is one of the most empowering processes that contributes to change. The participants collectively and individually came to the community of practice with the desire to learn from one another and to share knowledge, skills, resources, and new opportunities for learning. By the group creating a Model for Guiding Change: Collaborative Practice, they illustrated the importance of making their learning visible and disseminating their learning so that others might benefit from their experiences.

Discussion

Introducing an outdoor pedagogy curriculum in Canadian college ECE programs is new and can be challenging for faculty to implement, particularly if the content is being delivered outdoors (Dietze & Cutler, 2020). The participants identified that being part of a community of

practice contributed to increasing knowledge and adopting new teaching and learning strategies for outdoor learning experiences.

Educators with a desire to engage in research and to change practice are required to facilitate a shift in advancing outdoor pedagogy, the curriculum content, and teaching and learning practices. They must have a willingness to take risks to move from comfortable teaching and learning strategies to new ways of delivering content in their courses. Educators participating in a community of practice might find that such a shift in practice can be conceptualized more easily than for educators who work in isolation.

As illustrated above, there were many aspects of the community of practice experience that empowered participants to advance outdoor pedagogy theory in their programs and how they delivered the curriculum from an experiential lens rather than from a lecture format. The participants identified three key learnings. First, based on the responses from the participants, the role of the facilitator/coach is important for cohesion in a community of practice. They identified that having safe environments where they can freely identify and discuss their knowledge and the areas requiring further development, their fears, and their perceived lived experiences of barriers are essential if they are going to build the competencies needed to take the risks associated with change and to maintain positive change. They also indicated that having diverse perspectives increases opportunities to examine theory and application of theory to practice in flexible ways. Second, the participants identified that, when they examined the responses to the four core questions asked, for the first time in their practice, they experienced clarification on how and why they felt empowered by the community of practice. For them, establishing professional relationships where they could discuss ideas, perspectives, and comments, and create a pictorial representation of their lived experiences led them to better articulate what characteristics of the community of practice contributed to their learning experience. The process helped them determine how they could transfer tenets of the community of practice to their work with students and communities. Participants reflected on strategies that they could use to bring new learning about curriculum content and delivery

methods to the group and seek advice to work through implementation strategies. The community of practice helped them gain confidence and competence in evaluating their current teaching and learning values, and beliefs and practices, while fostering new ways of teaching and learning rooted in experiential learning.

Third, engaging in an array of teaching and learning strategies that the facilitator/coach brought to this community of practice, including making their learning visible through blogs, podcasts and conference presentations, illustrated not only their contributions to the participants' learning, but the value of having students share their learning in similar ways. The power of making their learning visible in a variety of formats helped the participants bring clarity to their learning. The participants identified that once they had tried a new teaching and learning strategy with members of the community of practice, they felt they were better prepared to use it as a teaching and learning strategy with students.

Conclusion

As outlined in this research on communities of practice, our findings suggest that bringing together individuals with an interest in a particular topic, such as outdoor pedagogy, and teaching and learning in college environments, can have a significant, positive effect on faculty development and student experiences. Our findings suggest that communities of practice can facilitate change in practice in a variety of disciplines, and there is merit in establishing a community of practice for college faculty to come together from different colleges and jurisdictions. Based on our findings, we recommend that bringing faculty together from the same discipline, but different institutions, will increase diversity in thinking and learning, which leads to examining curricular and teaching and learning experiences from multiple lenses. The community of practice model impacted curriculum development in outdoor pedagogy and fostered a deep appreciation for the transformative power of collaborative learning networks to shape the educational landscape and nurture holistic learning experiences.

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