Community of Practice is a Cultural Concern

Abstract

In its broadest sense, communities of practice defined as a group of people who share the same concerns. Even though the idea of communities of practice was very old, it became known in 1991 in the work of Lave and Wenger. The current study, thus, tackles some definitions of communities of practice given by different scholars, it also addresses some recent work dealing with the application of Community of Practice Theory, and then it attempts to examine James Paul Gee and Colin Lanknshear's definition of culture and Claire Kramsch's example given on culture. By analysing these two quotes, the term community of practice will be given another definition, which is that community of practice is a collection of people who share the same culture.

Keywords: communities of practice, James Paul Gee, Lanknshear, Kramsch, culture.

Introduction

Communities of practice are generally defined as a group of people who shared the same aims and interests. The idea of communities of practice is very old and it has been shared in several studies. However, it became known in 1991, exactly, in the work of Lave and Wenger (1991). In this study, therefore, I will be very brief, I am going to focus on the most important points that help me develop and give a significant idea of this work. For instance, In the first point, I am going to tackle definitions of communities of practice given by several scholars. In the second point, moreover, I am going to show some recent work about Community of Practice Theory to show to readers- or researchers in the domain of sociolinguistics- how Community of Practice is seen and applicated nowadays. In the last point, relying on James Paul Gee and Colin Lanknshear's definition of culture and Claire Kramsch's example given on culture, I am going to give my own definition to communities of practice.

Definitions of Community of Practice:

There are numerous definitions of communities of practice. Hildreth and Kimble (2000) define communities of practice as '' a group of professionals informally bound to one another through exposure to a common class of problems, common pursuit of solutions and thereby themselves embodying a store of knowledge''(p. 3). In other words, in a community of practice, the group are always maintaining to solve problems and sharing knowledge relating to their work. A related definition comes from Wenger & McDermott & Snyder (2002) who define communities of practice as "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"(p. 7). Some research shows that communities of practice can be online, Brown (1999), for instance, says:

> Community is quite possibly the most over-used word in the Netindustry. True community – the ability to connect with people who have similar interests – may well be the key to the digital world, but the term has been diluted and debased to describe even the most tenuous connections, the most minimal activity.

Wenger (n-d) claims that ''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.1). He also asserts not any community is a community of practice, so according to him a community of practice needs to have three characteristics that are explained as follow:

1. **The domain:** a community of practice needs to have a shared domain of interest, or in other words, any group in a community of practice should share the same competence of knowledge relating to a specific domain of work.

2. **The community:** to form a community, members in a community of practice need to exchange knowledge, help one another, etc.

3. **The practice:** a community of practice is not merely people who share the same interest but people who develop ideas, exchange experiences and tools and so on.

Allen (2000), by the same token, posits that the term community is not necessarily bound to a geographical area, but rather to common tasks, aims, interests, problems and solutions (cited in Haradhan, 2017, p.01). Accordingly, all the definitions mentioned above share one common definition, which is that communities of practice are a group of people who share the same concerns. In the next point, however, I rely on some recent work to indicate how Community of Practice Theory is applied in some domains.

The application of Community of Practice Theory:

In the light of what has been mentioned above, recent studies have mentioned that numerous fields have used the framework of the community of practice to describe and analyse the relationships between groups. In accordance with this, Gajda & Koliba (2009), for instance, abstract that it has been used in social psychology and gender studies to describe identity formation, that is, how an individual establishes more autonomy from others (p.100). In their article ''Evaluating the Imperative of Intra-organizational Collaboration'', published in 2007, Gajda and Koliba agree that the term community of practice is often linked to learning with all its kinds. That is to say, how learning occurs within the context of a community of practice. To further illustrate this point, Gajda and Koliba have linked Community of Practice Theory to John Goodlad's concept ''Cycle of

Inquiry'' which places learning within the context of the cyclical processes of ''DDAE'', or dialogue, decision making, action and evaluation. Therefore, this application of these ''DDAE'' to the framework of the community of practice provides a given group of learners with a satisfactory strategy not only to transmit knowledge but also to establish the success of the work (p.07). Other studies, moreover, regard communities of practice as a core element that reconstructs and manages knowledge. In this prospect, Bolisani & Scarso (2014) consider knowledge as inseparable from the mind of individuals and only through communities of practices this knowledge can be shared and managed (p.01). Accordingly, after having a general idea about Community of Practice Theory and how it is applied, relying on James Pau Gee Hull and Colin Lanknshear's definition of culture and Claire Kramsch's example of culture, I am going to give my own definition to communities of practice

Community of Practice's new perspective:

James Paul Gee Glynda Hull & Colin Lanknshear, when they define culture, say that ''cultures are not only national entities, but any group linked by common interests or history'' (cited in Kramsch, 2013, p.64). Kramsch (2013) supports this idea by giving the example of law school. She says that ''law school teachers and students enact specific social identities or 'social positions' in the Discourse of law school'' (p.64). From both quotes, one can understand that communities of practice can be defined as **a group of people who share the same culture.**

Conclusion:

In sum, communities of practice are broadly defined as members who have some aims and interests in common. In this paper, therefore, I rely on two quotes to provide communities of practice with a new definition. The first quote is provided by James Paul Gee &Colin Lanknshear, the second quote is provided by Claire Kramsch. The end of this work demonstrates that communities of practice are not linked only to interests and aims but also to culture.

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