**Lave and Wenger: Communities of Practice**

**and Situated Learning**

**Communities of Practice**

The concept of “Communities of Practice” was developed in the 1990s by anthropologist Jean Lave and social theorist and practitioner Etienne Wenger. In their work on researching apprenticeships in Africa, they noticed that apprentices did not just learn from the ‘master’ but from the whole community surrounding the activity. Learning a trade involved learning to be part of that community. From this insight, they observed that communities of practice are found in many different kinds of organisation: in education, in government, in voluntary and social sectors, internationally, and now, on the internet.

According to Wenger (2006), “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.”

This could include artists or writers working together on a project, workers developing solutions to a problem or tutors learning about education and literacy. Communities of practice may come together purposefully or they may arise naturally or by accident.

Lave and Wenger identified three key features of a community of practice:

1. The Domain: A community of practice has an identity which is defined by a shared area or ‘domain’ of interest’. Being part of the community implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members of the community from other people who are not part of it.

2. The Community: Members pursue their interest in the domain, engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. Interaction and learning together are essential elements of a community of practice.

3. The practice: Members of a community of practice share resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems. That is, they share their practice.

In conclusion, members of communities of practice work on many different activities together. Learning takes place in this social context and may be deliberate, but also may be incidental.

**Situated Learning**

Situated Learning recognises learning as a social process that happens in communities of practice, where people learn from and with the community. As a result of this social experience of learning, participants move from their place as newcomers, on the periphery of the community – from legitimate peripheral participation – to the centre, as a fully-fledged, competent participant. This means that learning is not only an internal process, within the individual, but a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice. Developing an identity as a member of a community is a crucial aspect of becoming skilful and competent in the domain.

Lave, Jean (1991) “Situated Learning in Communities of Practice”)

Wenger, Etienne (2006). ["Communities of practice: A brief introduction"](http://wenger-trayner.com/theory/). www.wenger-traynor.com/theory/