

Voluntary online content discussion seminars as potential avenues of teacher communities of practice

Deepa CHARI and (late) Sarita KAMAT

Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, HBCSE-TIFR, Mumbai, India

Abstract. There is much known about the outcomes or features of a developed community of practice, in general, and also about the teacher communities, however, there is less clarity on how such a teacher community emerges. We believe that the initial stage is the most important one as it is the deciding stage for the fate of the teacher community of practice. In this study, we report the perspectives of teacher participants from a series of year-long, voluntary online discussion sessions on school science and mathematics in India to understand the nature of emerging communities of practice.

Communities of practice are groups of people gathered with some common interest who engage in a process of collective learning. There is much known about the outcomes or features of a developed community of practice, in general, and also about the teacher communities, however, there is less clarity on how such a teacher community emerges [1, 2]. We believe that the initial stage is the most important one as it is the deciding stage for the fate of the teacher community of practice.

In this study, we report perspectives of teacher participants from a series of a year-long, voluntary online discussion sessions (VPDS) on school science and mathematics in India. These discussion sessions were organized under a government funded national program for teacher capacity building - Vigyan Pratibha. The program primarily caters teacher professional development opportunities to the teachers through residential camps, organized throughout the year for 10 days cumulatively, however, got shifted to online mode in the unprecedented times of the COVID 19 pandemic.

We collected the data by interviewing 18 participant teachers about their motivations of joining the voluntary sessions, continuing their participation, and experiences of interactions with the resources and members during the sessions. These aspects are analyzed using the communities of practice framework.

Teacher narratives revealed their motivations for frequent participation in these sessions, the impact on their professional lives as well as signs of mutual learning in disciplines like physics. We also extend the study during residential camps where selective teachers had more structured opportunities of interactions, and study the contrast of voluntary and fixed spaces (if any). This study sheds light on participant perspectives in online interactions and their implications in developing a community of practice of school teachers. The need of nurturing and relevance of such communities in India is also discussed.

References

- [1] C. Fracchiolla, B. Prefontaine, K. Hinko, Community of practice approach for understanding identity development within informal physics programs. *Phys. Rev. Phy. Educ. Res.* **16**(2) (2020) 020115.
- [2] M. Zaalouk, H. El-Deghaidy, L. Eid, Ramadan, Value creation through peer communities of learners in an Egyptian context during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Review of Education* **67**(1-2) (2021) 103-125.