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# “This Is Just What We Do”: PhD Students on Becoming Scholars in a Community of Practice

Linds Roberts, University of Colorado Boulder

## Abstract

Increasingly librarians are interested in how the community of practice (CoP) framework can provide a more complete picture of how information literacy practices are influenced by situated and social learning. Doctoral students are socialized into the practices of the academy and gradually take on the identity and work of a scholar in their field. As an illustration of the CoP framework among doctoral students, the author shares data from a qualitative study with a small group of early-career education PhD students who are developing their information literacy skills within their disciplinary and social contexts, using the CoP as a source of support and reflection around their identity development as scholarly researchers and writers. Using critical reflection, the author considers the role of a librarian-researcher in an existing CoP of doctoral students and what role librarians can play in supporting students' research and writing practices within the community.

*Keywords:* community of practice, information literacy, critical reflection

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## “This Is Just What We Do”: PhD Students on Becoming Scholars in a Community of Practice

As they enter their graduate programs, doctoral students are socialized into the practices of the academy and gradually take on the identity and work of a scholar in their field. Lave and Wenger (1991) described this process as “legitimate peripheral participation” (LPP), where newcomers begin on the fringes of a community of practice (CoP) and often (but not always) move towards greater participation and full membership by taking on the identity, practices, tools, and language of the community (p. 40).

Considering the social nature of Communities of Practice, legitimate peripheral participation and information literacy learning (IL) together offer helpful lenses for librarians. This article shares qualitative data gathered from a small group of early-career PhD students ( $N = 9$ ) using the context of their classroom and larger program as the communities of practice. The findings focus on the dynamics of the group, the larger context of academia, and the research and writing experiences of the individuals within the CoP. The author engages in critical reflection on the research process and the role of being a librarian in the community in addition to reporting the results of the research. This article builds on prior research on communities of practice within LIS and higher education to explore how information literacy practices are shared and co-constructed among graduate students within academic communities.

### Literature Review

#### Community of Practice Framework

Situated learning and the community of practice framework can offer a complementary perspective to the study of individual learners. Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed a community of practice (CoP) model as a component of social learning and identity development in context, or *situated learning*. This concept extends beyond an individual’s cognitive understanding to embrace social and cultural contexts of learning (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997). Situated learning or situated cognition draws from Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, and anthropological, linguistic, and critical theories, among other traditions, and continues to be expanded and critiqued by other scholars (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997). Lave and Wenger (1991) conceived of a CoP as not only the knowledge or skills within a group but also the relationships, people, language, and practices in which the group engages.

Later, Wenger (1998) continued to work on the conceptualization of CoP and took these ideas into the field of knowledge management, focusing more on the factors to construct intentional CoPs for learning purposes. This version of CoP is most commonly used by those drawing on the concept to create professional development groups and moves away from CoP as a framework to describe the learning process and into a vision of CoP as an educational model (Lea, 2005).

As part of the ongoing development of the concept of CoP, scholars have raised critical questions, such as how power dynamics play out in CoPs (Fuller, 2007; Lea, 2005). The language of “community” in CoP is “far from neutral, as it carries connotations of harmony and togetherness,” and minimizes conditions that can “inhibit” CoPs, such as an antagonistic advisor or a culture of overwork (Fuller, 2007, p. 20). Additionally, bias within a CoP based on race, gender, age, or other factors, may limit a participant’s access to resources and ability to engage in the CoP. These barriers, among others, may result in doctoral students being prevented from “full participation in the practices of a community; for example, where students struggle to engage in the unfamiliar discourse or literacy practices of the academy, always feeling excluded and on the margins” (Lea, 2005, p. 183-184). Such dynamics are crucial for librarians to be aware of in supporting doctoral students, especially students from groups who have been historically denied access to higher education.

#### Overview: Community of Practice and Higher Education

Since 2010 there has been a marked increase in publications on communities of practice within the education field, with 2,618 records in ERIC from 2010 to 2019 compared to 532 published from 2000 to 2009, and 29 items published from 1990 to 1999. Of these, several dozen doctoral dissertations, in particular, have focused on CoP in higher education environments. Particular areas of focus among these dissertations include CoPs for faculty or staff professional development and CoPs that support graduates and undergraduates in online, hybrid, or blended learning. Among CoP dissertations on graduate students, the author identified the following categories with several dissertations each: CoPs for English language learning graduate students, CoPs and human networks or social media for graduate student support, identity development among graduate students, CoPs for writing support for graduate students, and CoPs among doctoral students of education, the specific population of this article. However, as McCluskey Dean (2020) noted, not all of the publications using the term *community of practice* adhere closely to Lave and Wenger’s early

work or to Wenger's knowledge management extensions; they seem to be using the term to describe loose learning communities.

#### CoP and Doctoral Students in Education

Doctoral students in Lassig et al. (2013) described how their community of practice-style writing group supported their identity development as scholars, increased their self-efficacy and writing confidence, and mitigated the isolation that PhD programs can produce around writing. In a study of two education doctoral students in a qualitative research and writing seminar run as a community of practice-style group, McArthur (2011) found that identity development moving from "student" to "scholar," along with engaging in the language and practices of a scholar, was crucial to one student's growing participation in the community and the other's increasingly peripheral experience. Similarly, Gammel (2006) examined the development of 16 doctoral women alumnae's scholarly voice as it reflected their shifts in identity, which related to the women's perceptions of their participation in, or disengagement with, the CoP of their learning community. Online tools were found to be critical for students' academic and emotional support in a newly forming CoP during the first semester of an online doctoral program (Miller, 2007). Another dissertation focusing on a low-residency hybrid PhD program found that cross cohort microclimates (such as a shared social media group or shared housing) were critical for sustaining a community of practice, in particular with students cycling out of the community regularly through graduation (deChambeau, 2014). In contrast, Hager (2003) focused on PhD student and faculty mentoring relationships within the framing of LPP, finding that faculty mentoring was key to students accessing the resources and practices that would help them become socialized and develop their identities as scholars within the CoP. Hager noted power dynamics and not having a mentor with mastery of community practices as being barriers to effective participation in the CoP.

#### Community of Practice and LIS: Educational Model and Framework

Interestingly, Harris (2008) tracked a disappearance within LIS work of the conceptualization of information as situated within communities. He noted that this view of socially situated information was present in guidelines for bibliographic instruction in 1988 and 1993, but these references were removed in 2001 during the pivot towards information literacy and teaching concepts over tools. LIS scholars have advocated for re-integrating communities as sites of information literacy, arguing that it is necessary to discuss the communities in which learners participate, alongside the practices and information they

value (Harris, 2008; Hicks & Lloyd, 2016). Recently within LIS research, CoP has been situated under the umbrella of practice theory, drawing on socially-situated principles applied to information practices (Pilerot et al., 2017), and within the sociocultural lineage (Hicks & Lloyd, 2016; Lloyd, 2007).

Among the LIS articles associated with Wenger's later work on CoP as an educational model, one rapidly growing branch has described intentionally created online communities for teaching and learning purposes. These articles especially focus on CoP to support online programs (for a helpful review article, see Smith et al., 2017). Articles have addressed creating CoP for school library professionals and LIS students, particularly in hybrid or online environments (Burns et al., 2016; Clark, 2006; Katuščáková & Jasecková, 2019; Kymes & Ray, 2012). A second branch has documented librarians' desires to construct CoP for professional development purposes often related to teaching and research support (e.g., Coombs et al., 2017; McCluskey Dean, 2020; Graham, 2013; Wang et al., 2011; Weltin & Schultz, 2019). Many of these articles focus on how to initiate and sustain a professional development CoP.

In contrast, some LIS scholars have studied CoP as a framework, finding that CoPs help socialize members into new information practices within previously existing information landscapes. For example, Lloyd (2007) drew on her studies among firefighters and ambulance officers to advocate for IL to be considered as a sociocultural practice within unique contexts and with power dynamics at play. She used CoP to understand the social modalities of ways of knowing in addition to textual and embodied methods. Elmore and Stordy (2015) applied a CoP lens to the IL and digital literacy practices of five homeschooling families. Moring (2011) observed how two new employees negotiated conflicts in the information taught during a training course compared with the information their colleagues on the job valued in practice. These research examples using CoP as a framework demonstrate how IL practices are negotiated within communities.

#### CoP and Higher Education Contexts in LIS Research

Within higher education LIS environments, a mixture of CoPs as educational model and as a framework for understanding situated learning may be found. Farrell and Badke (2015) advocated for academic librarians to situate learning of information practices within academic disciplinary communities rather than marketing generic forms of IL to disciplinary faculty. They recounted a pilot study of interviews with three sociology faculty to

collaboratively determine their disciplinary information practices and expectations for students in order to inform curricula and assignments that would help students be active participants in disciplinary practices. Freeburg (2018) advocated for CoPs within the classroom with the purpose of inviting students to create noncanonical knowledge. Additionally, McCluskey Dean (2020) interviewed and surveyed staff and faculty to better understand IL practices when intentionally creating a professional development CoP focused on bringing together curriculum stakeholders to embed IL within disciplinary programs.

Among graduate students, Webster and Whitworth (2019) examined the influence of power on information practices that developed within small groups of master's students engaging through online discussion boards in the United Kingdom. They found that practices varied widely across the groups, with some communicating outside of official course channels to subvert instructor surveillance. While not examining CoPs specifically, but using a sociocultural lens on information practices, Reyes et al. (2018) explored the experiences of Spanish-speaking international graduate students. They found that students' transitions to graduate school in the U.S. were accompanied by affective and identity shifts including pressure to be socialized into their new academic environment, and later, to balance marketability with desire to be useful to their home communities. While these students initially used many different strategies to orient themselves to their new information landscape, over time they developed strategies for building community connections within their field and defining a niche for themselves as scholars to be able to participate fully within their discipline as academics. These studies demonstrate that there is much opportunity to grow CoP work in LIS, whether using CoP as a framework for situated learning or as an educational model.

## Research Context and Methodology

To illustrate the usefulness of CoP as a framework for situated learning among doctoral students, the author conducted a small mixed methods study ( $n = 9$ ) in spring 2017 with education PhD students. The specific research context for this study was a large, predominantly White research institution in the western United States. The education school is highly ranked for its graduate programs nationally and has focused heavily on graduate education in the past few decades, with several doctoral-granting programs. The author's positions in reflecting on this study include being raised White and female, though the author now identifies with a nonbinary gender identity. As a researcher-practitioner

librarian, the author currently holds a tenure-track faculty position at a large research institution.

This study is part of a larger project planned with an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell, 2015) and used convenience sampling through a partnership with the instructor of a spring 2017 graduate education course. The majority of the nine students enrolled in the course were in the first three years of their doctoral program. The author conducted three in-class workshops on literature reviews, focusing on topics such as advanced strategies for searching specialized education databases, Kuhlthau's Information Search Process, and the affective side of research, topic scope, productivity tools, and synthesis in writing a literature review. The author gathered written student reflections on the research and writing process, including what came naturally to them and what aspects felt like a struggle, before the first workshop, at the midpoint of the semester, and after the third workshop. During the third workshop, the instructor and author facilitated a short focus group-style discussion on students' research experiences and insights during the study, which were audio recorded and transcribed by the author for analysis. The reflections and focus group transcripts were anonymized by choosing an alphabetic identifier for each participant from R to Z. More details about the workshops and the pedagogical framing may be found in Roberts (2019), which focused on students establishing their own learning goals for the semester, while this article focuses on the social and CoP aspects of the study.

For this article, the focus group and reflection data were approached using several strategies following a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014). In particular, the author adopted the epistemological assumption that the researcher is constructing meaning alongside participants and embedded within social practices. In approaching data analysis, the author engaged in "constant comparison" of the data in iterative inductive cycles as described by Charmaz (2014). The author used three levels of analysis including a longitudinal comparison of students' individual reflections at three points in the semester, comparison among student experiences within the group, and comparison of the codes across coding cycles. Additionally, the researcher used a series of hand-coding cycles (Saldaña, 2016) and memos reflecting on patterns observed across all of the data points. When it became clear that the data suggested strong alignment with Community of Practice theory, this theory became a lens for further analysis and critical reflection. Because this study does not construct a new theory, the author would not claim that it adhered to all steps of constructivist grounded theory methodology as described by Charmaz (2014).



During analysis, the author confirmed accurate representation of the data through member checks (Flick, 2007). In May 2019, the author sent a draft of the manuscript to the nine students and professor associated with the study and received feedback from all but one individual with their thoughts on the findings and some suggestions for other portions of the article. Additionally, the author used reflexive reflection and audit trails, contributing to qualitative notions of validity (Carlson, 2010).

During successive rounds of data analysis, the following research questions emerged:

- What role does a CoP play in early-career PhD students' development of research and writing practices?
- How do they discuss participating in academia as future scholars and their role in it?
- How do new scholars talk about their research and writing?

## Findings

The following findings are organized by the three research questions.

RQ1: What role does a CoP play in early-career PhD students' development of research and writing practices?

In this small CoP, students' learning happened within the social contexts and community of practice of the education school as well as inside the class they were taking together. Data showed students learning and making meaning through peer relationships, relationships with advisors and professors, and in the context of the scholarly community within the discipline. Participant V recognized, "The best way for me to get access to quality articles is through courses and professors/peers. The more my network expands, the better access I have had to good papers." Another student valued this network for navigating unfamiliar sub-fields as well, explaining, "I'm thankful I have—advisors I trust who can say—well—she must have assigned this one for a reason—and it must've been a good piece...I want to be able to recognize those names, and when I don't, it makes me really nervous that I'm going down a wormhole that is not going—it's going to waste my time" (Participant Y). Other students agreed that they learn about the scholarly landscape within their subfields from faculty or advisors. At first, the author was surprised to hear the heavy importance of human or social sources from students. Yet Lloyd's (2007) work suggests that human social information networks are the norm in many communities of practice, and Reyes et al. (2018) also found that international graduate students built human networks of cohort peers and faculty who helped them map their field. Through successive rounds of coding the

author came to understand how important this theme was and to refocus the inductive inquiry around this theme.

A third student expressed a wish for the incoming PhD cohorts to develop a shared writing practice so that, “it just gets you in the habit, and, I mean, this is just what you—this is just what we do” (Participant W). The switch from “this is what you...” suggests a hypothetical “you” moving to a more concrete and collective “this is just what *we* do,” putting emphasis on developing and valuing shared practices as a cohort of new scholars.

Students’ discourse practices illustrated the ways the community shared, built, and negotiated meaning-making. During the focus group, participants built upon and validated group members’ experiences, “So I guess I’m struggling with how, kind of what [Participant T] said, like, how do I know that the little snapshot that I’ve gotten is good enough or takes a big enough view of the literature” (Participant X). Participants referenced shared issues the group had previously discussed, “that’s the same question: am I reading the right stuff and actually know if I’m reading the right stuff? Is this just what, you know, the database spit out for me?” (Unidentified participant from recording). This comment reflects a distrust in the lack of context for database results as students are learning the landscape of their subfields. After the first ten minutes, the focus group participants felt more at ease with the conversation and began to engage in cross talk and humor to confirm and validate each other within the group, as in this exchange:

Education professor: Do you feel like you have to read a lot to get to things that you actually want?

Participant Y: Yeah—

Unidentified Participant: A lot of reading and summarizing and then, realizing like [Groans]

Participant Y: —it really wasn’t—

Unidentified Participant: —it doesn’t really serve me—and it, you know, again and again and again, that process—until you find you know, three sentences—

Participant W: Yeah, right—

Unidentified Participant: Oh, those are the magic sentences!

Participant W: Read the ten things so you can write at most a sentence—right, it's like—

Unidentified Participant: Right—

Participant W: fifty hours of reading is like this one sentence—

[Laughs]

Unidentified Participant: It's sort of hard to gear up for that.

Participant Y: Yeah, it's hard to convince myself to do that reading. Like I—I mean, I literally bribe myself to do it—like, okay, if I read these, I'll reward myself. It's ridiculous, but—it's what I do.

The cross talk and fragmented speech among group members illustrate how shared meaning is established and built upon in successive iterations during this conversation. Participants struggled with how they imagined they were expected to engage with the literature compared to the reality, including the inefficiencies and the ways they negotiated to accomplish the work. This also suggests a public/private tension between expectations of what scholars “should” do and how the work gets done, or is resisted, in practice. The affective content in this passage shows frustration and doubt through the use of sarcasm. Humor brings different members of the CoP together to share these frustrations around reading loads, normalizing this shared experience, and upholding relationships among those in the CoP. Whereas students might feel pressure to “save face” or appear that they know how certain reading and writing practices work in a setting that feels public, within this CoP setting, there was a sense of relief in naming the areas with which the group members struggled.

RQ2: How do they discuss participating in academia as future scholars and their role in it?

The author was struck by examples students gave of the ways power and norms operated in their experience as graduate students, their expectations for themselves, and how they perceived success. For example, Participant Y discussed hierarchical structures of advising and mentoring:

You know, I don't really have a problem with citing my own advisor, because my work is a little bit different, but one of the people who's probably the biggest researcher in my field is on my committee! ... so I was like, god, I hope I'm not citing this wrong! There's like, there's a lot of anxiety, I want to talk to this person, they

have power—What if I’m not citing it right? What if I’m misrepresenting what they said?

This participant explicitly recognized the power dynamic inherent in citing a well-known scholar that reflected their position as a newcomer to the scholarly community. In a related context, Participant Y discussed resistance around “the things that I want to read and the things I’m supposed to read for class.” They identified excitement and joy in following their own curiosity compared with a sense of compulsion with assigned readings where they found they had to “convince myself and bribe myself... I will put it off until the last minute because I just hate it so much!” This sentiment echoes the “paying your dues” mentality of CoP among masters towards apprentices, as described by Lave and Wenger (1991).

Participant Z blended several examples of academic cultural norms, including expectations for a formal, neutral, professional tone in academic writing, the pervasive pressure to “do research right,” and to be responsible to the various communities in which they were a member:

Well, I think it’s people reading it, but it’s also, like, considering other literature, doing a literature review is stressful. And so that’s where the, “Did I read the right thing—and do I know what people are expecting me to know—like, with things that people don’t commonly know—have I reached out enough to tie communities together?” ’cause I feel like that’s the spot that I’m in. I’m in a spot where I’m trying to go across multiple communities, and they still feel really siloed.

Reyes et al. (2018) also found that international graduate students recognized differences between their first language and formal academic writing in English, feeling pressure to navigate the languages of their communities and the languages salient to their academic reputations. Coffman et al. (2016) also noted that doctoral students worked to “integrate multiple identities and roles” and found themselves needing to “bridge the gap between different life roles” (pp. 30–33).

RQ3: How do new scholars talk about their research and writing?

When students described their concerns around research and writing in their individual reflections, they used affective language including words such as “traumatic,” “struggling,” “super nervous,” “perfectionist,” “stressful,” “overwhelming,” “anxious,” and “ridiculous” (Participants T, X, Y, Z). Such language reflects how students in this group may feel they are

already expected to know how to engage in research and writing practices. A student in the focus group put these emotions into the context of the research process saying, “[a]nd so then I’ve been relying on talking to different faculty members, like, ‘Who should I read if I care about this thing?’ and then going to their references—and going backwards because—I just felt afraid that even though this is a body of literature I’m not familiar with, I should recognize some names!” (Unidentified Participant from focus group recording). In this example, the student was looking for signposts of major scholars within a new landscape of literature, recognizing concerns around trustworthiness and credibility and using strategies, like citation chaining and recommendations from faculty, to navigate the literature. This approach is similar to Reyes et al.’s (2018) finding that recognizing scholar’s names was a landmark that helped international graduate students orient themselves in the scholarly landscape.

Within this particular cohort, the community of practice made space for the affective aspects of students’ experiences. By discussing these experiences within a group of peers, students could feel validated and receive support. Aspects of practice that might encompass doubt and shame for an individual, could begin to feel normalized within the group. This is not to say, however, that all individuals felt supported equally within the community, had space or agency to voice their concerns, or that the community functioned smoothly at all times.

#### Limitations

For this small illustrative qualitative study (n=9), the author used a convenience sample, and the results cannot be said to be representative of the larger population of education PhD students. However, the study explored an existing CoP, so a convenience sample of an existing learning community made sense in this case. Almost certainly, the author’s presence as a researcher may have altered the nature of the CoP. As constructivist grounded theory acknowledges, the researcher’s active engagement in “construction and interpretation of data,” is in opposition to more positivist views on objectivity and neutrality of the researcher (Charmaz, 2014, p. 14). Due to the author’s relationship with students and their relationships with each other, it is also possible that student comments were subject to social desirability bias.

## Discussion

As a researcher-practitioner, this research project has challenged the author to recognize the role that community plays in learning and professional identity, both among the graduate students in the study and for the author as a participant in the CoP. Within the context of this particular community of practice, the larger culture of academia places emphasis on individual achievement and originality, and this is sometimes at odds with the social and situated ways people learn in the field of education: through conversation with others, through reading others' work, through feedback from others. Lave and Wenger (1991) state, "To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation" (p. 101).

While individuals may begin on the periphery of a field as novices, trajectories are defined by interactions with these communities. In the case of higher education, these interactions include participating at conferences, in professional associations, and through formal scholarly publication. Increasingly, these connections are being made through scholarly conversations happening on social media, with scholars noting the use of social media for support among doctoral students (Herndon-Stallings, 2018; Owens, 2019; Reyes et al., 2018). Having a skilled advisor as a mentor can greatly aid a student's progress in the community (Hager, 2003). Sometimes these trajectories move individuals towards the center of the community as they become more experienced. Sometimes, as Wenger and others described and some of the graduate students in this study reflected, individuals may find themselves spanning the boundaries of communities, discover they are limited in membership or access within a community, or find themselves growing out of a community (Gammel, 2006; McArthur, 2011; Wenger, 1998). Reyes et al. (2018) suggested reframing IL workshops for graduate students around the LPP transition stages they identified, "grasping at straws," "mastering the canon," and "making their mark" that roughly translate to moving from the periphery towards full participation in the academic community (p. 609-610). Duguid (2005) captured the identity shifts of LPP in comparison to more straightforward cognitive models of learning.

Thus, learning in the sense of becoming a practitioner... can usefully be thought of as learning *to be* and contrasted to what Bruner calls "learning about." The former requires knowing *how*, the art of practice, much of which lies tacit in a CoP.

Learning *about* only requires the accumulation of knowing *that*, which confers the ability to talk a good game, but not necessarily to play one. (p. 113)

With a CoP lens, learning, social practices, and identity are understood to be entwined.

From working with students in this CoP, the author advocates for librarians to conceptualize research and writing processes more broadly, as a social journey that integrates professional learning, identity development, and growth, rather than a series of boxes to be checked. As Lea (2005) discussed, students' interactions in higher education often include the departmental secretary, the tech help desk, library help desk, and others, and these all form a part of students' CoP. This view of including librarians as members of academic CoPs aligns with Farrell and Badke's (2015) notion of situating IL within disciplinary CoP as well as Harris (2008) and Freeburg's (2018) notions of CoP within classrooms for situated and noncanonical learning.

Returning to the title quote, "this is just what we do," a participant regretted that their cohort had not been socialized to have regular writing time together in their first year, feeling that this would have developed shared habits around writing, as well as social support, that would have made writing easier later on. During the focus group the author was surprised to learn that students consciously viewed the librarian as a member of their CoP and were interested in the librarian being present during shared writing time. Over the course of the study, the researcher noted that students particularly appreciated the librarian reaching out with suggestions on their literature review, validating the range of students' affective feelings raised by the research process, and checking in with students' progress informally. Students valued the librarian being present in the education building in ways that facilitated casual conversations in the hallways, in addition to formal workshops and consultations. By engaging in this research study as a researcher-practitioner the author was able to learn a great deal about the norms, practices, and limitations of the larger disciplinary CoP from the nine students and instructor. This experience made clear the importance of social and relational learning between the librarian and the CoP members, where the librarian is also able to learn and grow, in addition to contributing to the growth of other members.

Exploring Writing Support in the CoP: From Situated Learning Framework to Educational Model

As a result of discussions that took place during and after the study, students helped the author begin a pilot program of shared office hours in the School of Education building

running from fall 2018 through spring 2020, where both a Writing Center tutor and the librarian were available for consultation and open writing time. These office hours were located in a small conference room space in the Education building that aimed for both semi-quiet conversation and focused individual work around a large table. The author and graduate students advertised the space as a “Community of Practice for Research and Writing.”

Over the four semesters it was offered, the space was used regularly by a handful of graduate students working on writing projects or seeking research help from the librarian, as well as a larger number of undergraduates looking for writing help. The space sometimes included social elements among participants who know each other, including those who stopped by to chat informally with the librarian. The author is interested to see how this group might continue to evolve as new cohorts matriculate, whether student-initiated writing spaces will form either within cohorts or across the larger CoP, and how the librarian may continue to support students’ research and writing practices within the community.

This pilot initiative formed a bridge between the CoP as a framework for situated learning about existing spaces and CoP as an educational model formed for intentional support. The literature has suggested intentionally-created writing CoPs for doctoral students can help students practice their scholarly voices within academic disciplinary writing modes; become accustomed to taking on a more authoritative voice in their work through the zone of proximal development with other students; engage in sharing of work and critique with fellow students that moves from learning *about* to *doing*; and benefit from the modeling guidance of faculty (Chatterjee-Padmanabhan & Nielsen, 2018; McArthur, 2011). Additionally, doctoral students have discussed how their own shared Research Writing Group supported their identity development and self-efficacy as scholars and reduced their sense of isolation and anxieties over time (Lassig et al., 2013). The group described in Lassig et al.’s (2013) article seemed to have more student-ownership, but it was initially begun by their advisor.

### Conclusion

Future research would benefit from librarians exploring CoPs as a framework for situated learning. This would deepen the profession’s understanding of the social nature of IL learning among doctoral students in various contexts as well as provide opportunities for exploring existing intentionally-constructed CoPs that may aid doctoral students in their



learning journeys. Lea (2005) advocated for CoP to be considered as a heuristic that, in addition to yielding insight into the learning process, highlights the ways in which meaning is constructed and restricted within the academic community. In considering the increasing diversity of students on our campuses across race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and sexuality, among other identities, it is important for librarians, especially White librarians like the author, to consider how students are bridging communities and contexts, and how meaning and access to tools and information contribute to or limit their legitimate peripheral participation in the academic community. Finally, it is clear that librarians are often already part of these existing CoPs within students' networks and that both librarians and students may participate as learners and contributors to the community.

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