

CaRE Introductory Handbook

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The European Commission's support to produce this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

I. INTRODUCTION	1
I. WHAT	2
<i>What is a Community of Practice</i>	2
2. WHY	3
<i>Why create a Community of Practice?</i>	3
<i>Why Should Schools Establish Communities of Practice?</i>	3
3. HOW	4
<i>How to establish a community of practice, with the goal of developing a Collaborative and Reflective Environment (CaRE) in your school.</i>	4
<i>Getting started in Summary - Overview..</i>	6
<i>Requirements for success - Aims and Goals.</i>	6
<i>Getting started in more detail – Deeper understanding.</i>	7
4. CONCLUSION	9
5. APPENDIX	10

CaRE Introductory Handbook

How to get started with Collaborative and Reflective Environments in Schools -
What to Consider when Starting a CaRE Journey

Introduction

A Collaborative and Reflective Environment (CaRE) in schools embodies a culture of community, collaboration, and reflection at all levels in the school.

It is reflected by:

A universal understanding of the value and importance of collaboration, communication innovation and reflection, and how they should be realised in the staffroom and, by extension, the classroom.

A recognition of the value of teacher and student voice and ongoing dialogue.

A recognition of the importance of Continuous Professional Learning that is integrated, embedded and the norm, providing opportunities to share ideas, knowledge, and reflections in an environment in which mistakes and successes are both valued.

The focus for professional change, in CaRE, is on the adoption of key skills and competences by teachers, which are normally advocated for student use and not in particular for teachers.

What

To achieve these goals set out above, it is essential that a group of teachers come together with a common goal. This is commonly known as a Community of Practice. It is this concept that underpins the development of a CaRE school.

What is a Community of Practice?

- A community of practice is a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or interest in a topic and who come together to fulfil both individual and group goals.
- CoPs often focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance a domain of interest or professional practice.
- Interaction on an ongoing basis is an important part of this. A community's specific purpose and goals inform the appropriate activities and technologies that should support it. (Wenger, 1999).

Three characteristics are essential to forming an effective COP:



Why

Why create a Community of Practice?

A CoP is achieved over time by the development of continuous interactions and practices within the community. It can work in formal or informal settings but in a shared environment. Communities develop practice in many ways including problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, (Lave & Wenger, 1991). CoPs can develop learning between participants and encourage opportunities for information exchange in informal settings. Li (2009)

Many European and International reports, such as the TALIS [report](#), have identified engagement in collaborative practices as a very important element of their professional development. Teacher collaboration is the foundation of a Community of Practice, and therefore is also essential in any CaRE school

Why Should Schools Establish Communities of Practice?

The focus of CaRE has been on developing structures, frameworks and resources to develop effective communities of practice within and between schools, by engaging teachers in collaborative and reflective practices The development of a teacher community of practice would support:

- Improved engagement and motivation of members within the school organisation
- Developing a more value-based, student-centred, and up-to-date model of education within the school
- Upskilling staff on latest teaching and learning pedagogies.



How

How to establish a community of practice, with the goal of developing a Collaborative and Reflective Environment (CaRE) in your school.

Getting started in Summary - Overview

These steps have been formulated as a simple and straightforward approach to starting your Community of Practice and moving towards developing a collaborative and reflective environment in your school. In developing this streamlined approach CaRE project teachers from the partner schools, (based in Ireland, Poland, Austria, Czech Republic, and Spain) collaborated and provided pointers to support aspects of starting and building the CoP as follows.

Step 1: Establish a goal or a purpose.

- This can be decided by an individual teacher, or a group of teachers based on the needs they observe in their school.
- Bring the idea to administration/leadership team for approval.
- Care Teacher comments
- Meet with school leadership before the group is created. It is pointless to move forward without administration approval.
- Because of time and space issues the leadership must be involved in starting the CoP.
- Outcomes



Step 2: Share the goal & recruit members.

- Talk to staff members (teachers, SNA, principals, etc.) about the need that you have identified.
- Gauge interest and establish an initial group of interested teachers – this will be your initial Community of Practice.
- For a successful CoP, membership should always be voluntary.
- Get each teacher to ask themselves the question “What’s in it for me?” It is very important to ensure that the teachers involved see the value of their efforts, not just from a larger perspective, but also for themselves.
- Care Teacher comments
- For CoP members to understand and embrace the topic, they should all see the need of the work before joining the team.
- For the CoP to achieve its purpose it must have clear outcomes



Step 3: Decide on logistics for the CoP

- As a CoP, agree on meeting times
- Create a timetable/timeline for meetings
- Determine length of meetings
- Agree on face-to-face, virtual, or hybrid meeting format.
- The group needs to agree on a platform for sharing documents.
- The facilitator will be determined at the beginning of the project creation
- What our teachers say:
- Face to face is the preferred way, but often it is not possible. So online via MS Teams or other tools are a good solution to that.
- Like-minded colleagues approach directly. Then send out information via mail and/or other school apps to all teachers.

Step 4: Goal Setting & Planning

- Using the Tools for Reflection documents, create an achievable goal/outcome for the CoP based on the initial issue that was identified.
- Determine facilitator roles (note taker, communication officer, timekeeper, etc....)
- Come up with checkpoints (what do you want to accomplish and by what date?)
- Use the worksheets in Appendices 1 and 2 to begin cultivating your CoP and defining its purpose and activities
- Begin!
- What our teachers said
- In Austria a team was setup around the theme of " basic digital education" for the CoP. This created interest and more teachers with similar or other ideas joined after some time. The theme got bigger within time and expanded to Technology and Co-planning in Art.

Requirements for success - Aims and Goals

- Clear goals and a common sense of purpose.
- A core group of teachers and management leading the whole school.
- Strong and supportive leadership structures.
- Regular meetings: teachers, management, inter-departmental and year-group teams.
- Core members leading the whole school in continuous professional development (CPD) afternoons/days.
- Core members acting as role-models for colleagues and students.
- Teachers sharing experiences online.



Getting started in more detail – Deeper understanding

STEP 1

- Connect with like-minded colleagues (your CaRE team) and arrange a time to meet (face-to-face or online). Note that it is important that participation should be voluntary
- How will sourcing of like-minded colleagues work in your school – can you send out an email to all teachers, or do a shout-out in the staffroom? Or is it better to approach some other potential ‘changemakers’ or individuals that you have observed leading change in the past?
- When and how is it preferable for the group to meet – in person or online, at the end of a school day or at lunch time? Is there a room where you can meet regularly?
- Consider the concept of CaRE outlined above – this is the primary focus of this project, so it should be understood and embraced by all CoP members.



STEP 2

- Consider your own reasons for joining the CoP, (“What’s in it for me”) and your understanding of what you can each contribute
- To be a “CaRE teacher” – what do you think this means?
- What does it mean to others in the group?
- Is it useful to set out your own version, as a CoP, of the CaRE Charter? What would it say?
- Every one of the CoP should consider, and discuss the question “What’s in it for me?”



STEP 3

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STEP 4

- Select at least one area that you would like to develop as a group →The purpose is to encourage collaboration, so it needs to have a certain consensus.

Examples (from CaRE project, briefly described)

- a. Deciding on a unifying school ethos
- b. Collaborating to introduce new digital technologies into teaching
- c. Using existing SEN data to streamline provision for students with additional needs



STEP 5

- Use the [Tools for Reflection](#) to identify:
- Your desired endpoint – what will it look like in your school if your problem is solved, and goals achieved?
- The steps required to get there
- Who needs to be involved and how? Teachers, school leaders, students, parents etc.
- Which [CaRE School Practices](#) will be useful, and at which points in your journey?
- Data can be entered into the Tools for Reflection at various points along the journey, to assess progress and correct course if necessary.

Conclusion

A Community of Practice supports teachers to develop an understanding and the value and importance of communication, collaboration, communication innovation and reflection, and how they should be embedded in the staffroom and, by extension, the classroom. By setting up your CoP you are recognising the importance of Continuous Professional Learning that is integrated, embedded, and providing opportunities to share ideas, knowledge, and reflections in an environment in which mistakes and successes are both valued. The CaRE partner teachers have all embraced and continue to collaborate in their CoPs providing enriching experiences not only for themselves but for their students too.




Appendix

Key Questions to Explore

Part 1: Tool for engagement


Audience: Who is this community for?

Who are the community's important stakeholders
(who will be involved and interested and who will it benefit)?



Goals, and Expected Outcomes:


Given the audience and topic,
what is this community's primary purpose?
What are the benefits to the stakeholders?
What specific needs will the community aim to meet?




Building a CoP

Part 2: Tool for development


Activities: What kinds of activities will you undertake, to generate energy and momentum to support the Community of Practice?



Communication: How will members communicate on an ongoing basis to accomplish the community's primary purpose?



Interaction: What kinds of interactions (with each other and with the content of the community) will generate energy and engagement?



Learning: What are the learning goals (refer to the documents from Part 1) of the community, and how can collaborative learning be supported?



Collaboration: How will community members collaborate with each other to achieve shared goals?

