



# Communities of Practice

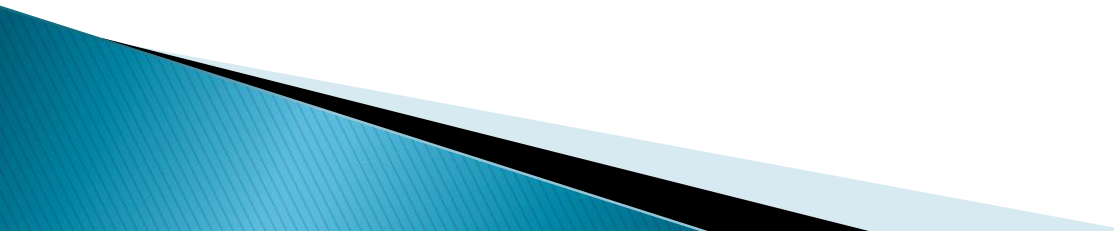
# School improvement

- ▶ School improvement is most surely and thoroughly achieved when teachers engage in *frequent continuous* and increasingly *concrete talk* about teaching practices... and become capable of distinguishing one practice and its virtue from another.

(Judith Warren Little, *Education Researcher*)



# A teachers' community of practice

- ▶ Members of a community of practice are *practitioners* who interact regularly and build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.
  - ▶ Members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information.
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- ▶ They develop a *shared repertoire of resources*: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short *a shared practice*.
- ▶ It takes time and sustained interaction to develop these sets of stories and cases that become a shared repertoire for their practice.

(Wenger, 2006)

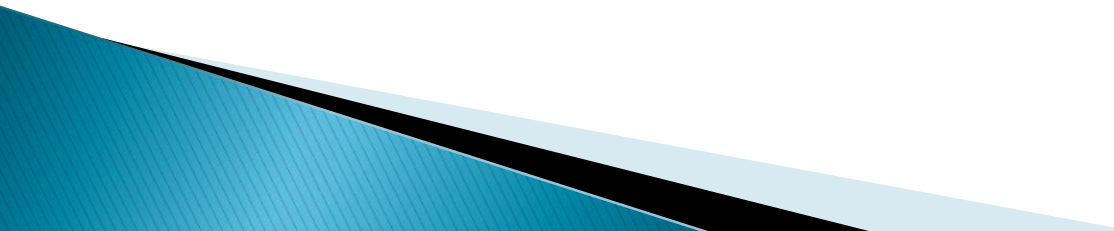
# CoPs in education (i)

In creating CoP in schools, we have asked teachers, principals and administrators to recast the learning – teaching process as **a set of partnerships ...**

- ▶ with the Ministry ... in support of learning as well as embodying a monitoring / assessment function

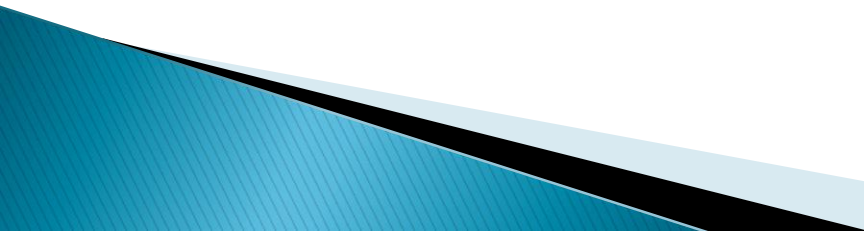
- ▶ with principals and teachers as valued members of a teaching – learning community ... sharing transparent and consistent values / aims in a supportive school culture

## CoPs in education (ii)

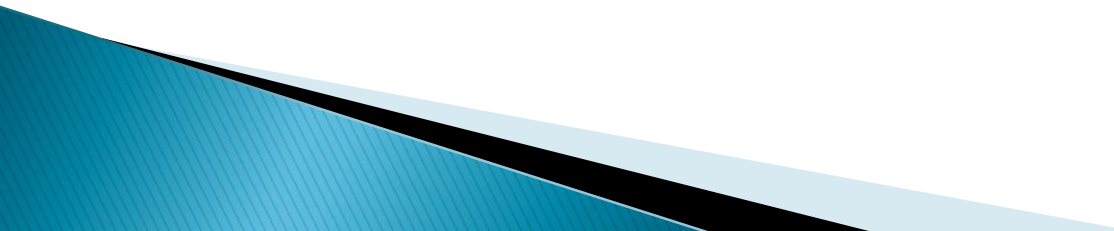
- ▶ with principals and teachers in generating and sustaining professional development, so that teaching becomes less of an isolated and isolating experience
  - ▶ with students in getting them to talk openly about their own learning
  - ▶ aiming to empower participants, and to develop a cycle of affirmation and trust between teachers, and with students, teaching staff and parents (as involved participants)
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# Communities of Practice *in* practice

## A focus on teaching and learning ...

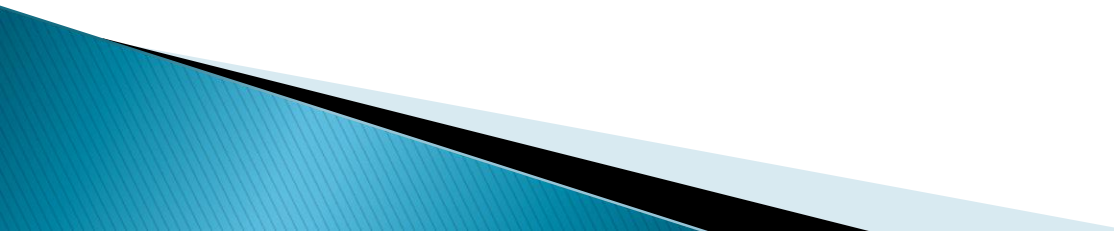
- ▶ At the school level with (teaching) staff
  - ▶ At the zone level ... with school leaders / outstanding practitioners
  - ▶ At the school level, with students
  - ▶ At the zone level, with students ... through an inter-school Council
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# The focus of COP in Zone 1

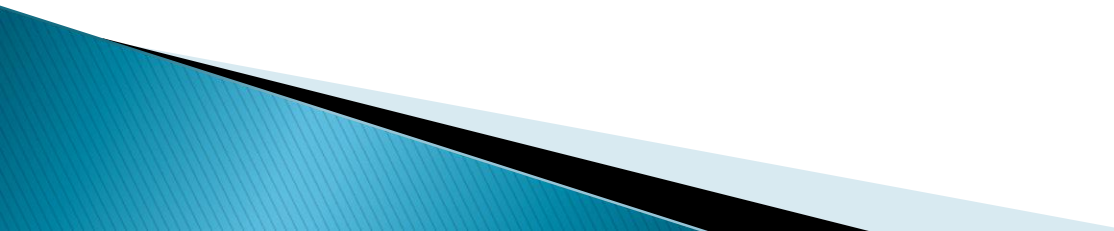
- ▶ Specifics ...
    - ❖ What has emerged from lesson observations / pupils' focus groups / shared reading – shared learning?
    - ❖ Can we identify the essence of good practice re interactive pedagogies / teaching styles / school ethos?
    - ❖ What impact is being felt in schools amongst (i) teachers (ii) pupils?
    - ❖ Has any change occurred as a result?
    - ❖ Are other initiatives effecting changes in achievement?
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# Communities of Practice in Practice: aspirations

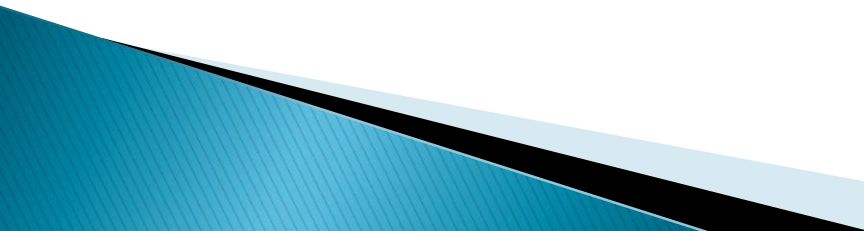
- ▶ How far has each school and the Zone 1 schools as a whole become a community of practice, with a whole school ethos which focuses on leadership, pedagogy and achievement?
  - ▶ How far have (i) headteachers (ii) teachers been able to work together to share elements of successful practice, and consider how to promote them effectively in their schools.
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# Issues in development of CoP

- ▶ Who *are* the school leaders? How can they be welded into a team? How can their potential be maximised?
  - ▶ What is the central role of the Principal (the manager / leader dilemma)?
  - ▶ How is the role of the Ministry / Education Officers perceived by teachers? Inspectorial? Monitoring achievement? Supportive?
  - ▶ Where are sources of support for new / untrained teachers: classroom observations, positive feedback, focused support? Role of teacher trainers?
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# Progress

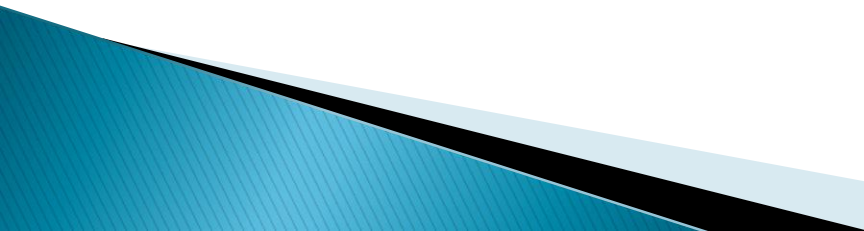
In some schools, effective and open debate fostered about the quality of learning and of teaching through ...

- joint planning
  - active mentoring
  - truncated days to allow whole staff activity ‘model’ teaching and whole staff feedback
  - ‘update’ presentations by younger teachers, to integrate and value
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- ▶ ‘Well, we started a thing here amongst ourselves where teachers were asked to teach a lesson for the staff to ... watch and then we would critique the strengths and weaknesses, and I thought that was really something positive for us, because there are times when you’re just sitting among yourselves, you know, you have a lesson to teach and sometimes you just don’t know how to approach it, and then you’re watching another teacher and you say, but wait, I never even thought of that, so it really adds ... and also it allows you to look at yourself to see, when you put yourself in the students’ position, and now you see when the teacher stands in front of you, sometimes you understand what it’s like to be a student’.

# Challenges in inter-school CoP

Need to establish context where ...

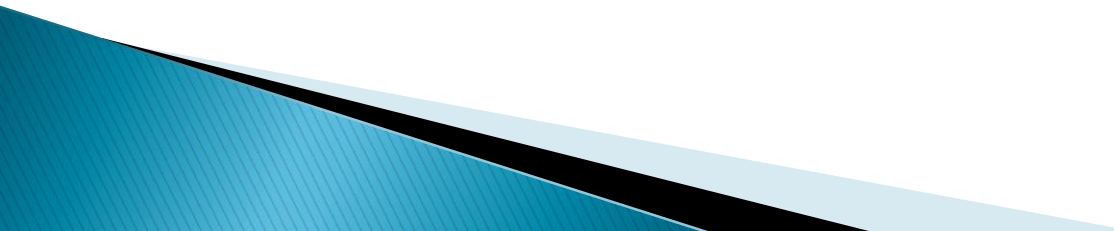
- ▶ Talk can be non-critical, non-threatening
  - ▶ Suspicion and fear of 'being reported on' through 'schools' gossip networks' are minimised
  - ▶ Hierarchical atmosphere avoided, but schools / teachers can offer different perspectives openly and without 'superiority', and others are open to accept validity of alternative views without feeling heartened or undermined
  - ▶ Role of Principal is understood!
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# Findings (i)

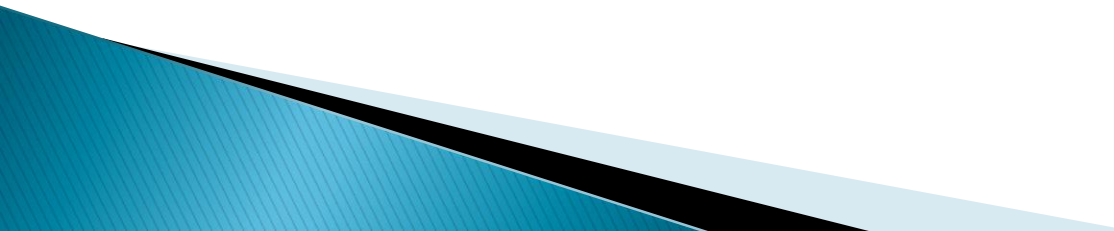
- ▶ Teachers need time and space to establish trust; reduce suspicion; learn to listen to each other & not dominate; overcome initial fears of criticism, being devalued, undermined.
  - ▶ Need a tight and focused agenda.
  - ▶ Need continuity of membership and regularity of meetings.
  - ▶ Need to identify key school leaders in teaching and learning, to lead initiatives.
  - ▶ Offers teachers opportunities to review own teaching practices, relationships with pupils.
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# Findings (ii)

Three significant developmental areas:

- ▶ Enabled teachers to engage in new initiatives, to develop shared understandings and adapt new initiatives to local cultural contexts
  - ▶ Built up a sense of value and achievement amongst teachers ... celebrating essence of own local good practice ...empowering
  - ▶ Given voice to and valued students' perspectives about their own learning and schooling.
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# Taking the CoP forward

- ▶ A need to re-emphasis notions of mutuality of support for teachers and identification of good practice.
  - ▶ A proactive approach by school SLT, rather than a reactive or a permissive approach; leadership rather than management, a willingness to innovate and take risks.
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# CoP as tools for transformation ?

- ▶ Establishing a school culture which emphasises **achievement** and represents it in & beyond classroom
  - ▶ Commitment to address under-achievement at an individual level
  - ▶ Active use of performance data to inform and monitor practice
  - ▶ **School-community liaison** to develop a learning community *in* the community: carer / parental / family support for learners
  - ▶ **Student voice**: Imaginative thinking about ways pupils can become engaged in the life of the school
  - ▶ **Innovation**: A willingness to take risks / to embed and sustain innovation through time
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