

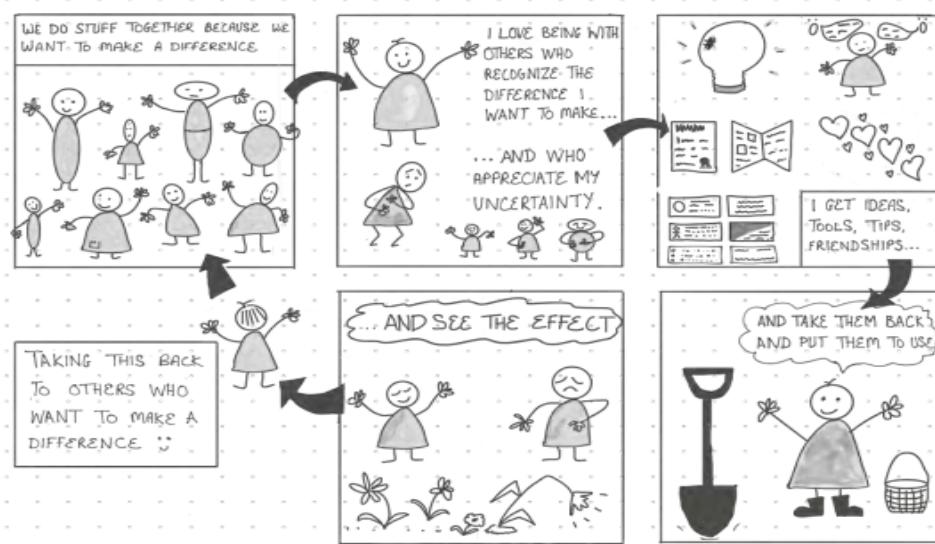
Join an Early Years Community of Practice



Calling all educators and educational leaders looking to expand skills and connections

LEQ is launching a new professional learning pilot initiative across LEQ long day care and kindergarten early learning services: Communities of Practice.

Participants will meet in Communities of Practice ('CoPs') to share and grow their professional practices and expertise.



Why participate?

Image from Wenger et al (2024) *Communities of practice within and across organizations: a guidebook*.

CoPs are one of the most effective mechanisms of professional learning, particularly in education.

You'll get to:

- ✓ **Build connections** and friendships with early childhood professionals from other services
- ✓ **Expand your knowledge, confidence and use of evidence-based practices**, and how to use these practices in different ways (e.g. the planning cycle in a kindy room versus a nursery room)
- ✓ **Strengthen supports and service delivery for the children and families you serve**
- ✓ **Improve morale and retention for you and your colleagues**
- ✓ **Improve outcomes for children!**

What's involved?

- 5 x 2hr meetings (March, April, May, June)
 - These will be during work hours, and LEQ will provide catering.
- During the meeting: Connect with colleagues from other services, share experiences, critically reflect on professional practice
- Between meetings: Apply and tweak practices discussed in the CoP meetings

Interested?

Complete the Expression of Interest Form here: <https://forms.office.com/r/DUpLbYFka9>.

Places are limited! Expressions of Interest close on Thursday 12 February.

For more information...

Read the CoP Fact Sheet (Pages 3-6 of this document), or chat to your CSM.





FAQs

What is a Community of Practice (CoP)?

A community of practice (CoP) is ‘a group of people who share a passion or ideas for improvement of practice for something they do and want to learn to do it better through regular interaction’.

A CoP is a highly effective way of developing and expanding adults’ professional knowledge and skills across many fields – including in early childhood education and care.

CoPs are used by Goodstart Early Learning, Gowrie, the Victorian and ACT education departments, and many more organisations across Australia and the world.

Each CoP has:

- a Facilitator (sometimes called a moderator or convenor) – usually a peer with deeper or broader expertise and experiences, who supports reflective dialogue, inquiry and practice improvement
 - *In this LEQ initiative, we invite Educational Leaders to express interest as Facilitators.*
- Members – who share reflections, experiences, ideas and questions

CoPs may also be referred to as ‘professional learning networks’, ‘communities of learning’, ‘professional learning communities’, and ‘professional communities of teachers and educators’.

How do CoPs work?

CoPs work through social learning. Diving into a chosen focus area in a group meeting format, members share critical reflections, their experiences and questions, and discuss their ideas. (See diagram below.)

1. Informal chat (the foundation)

Free-range conversations to build rapport and connections. Members choose area(s) of focus. **This is where trust and identity are nurtured.**

2. Facilitated reflection on professional practice (the substance)

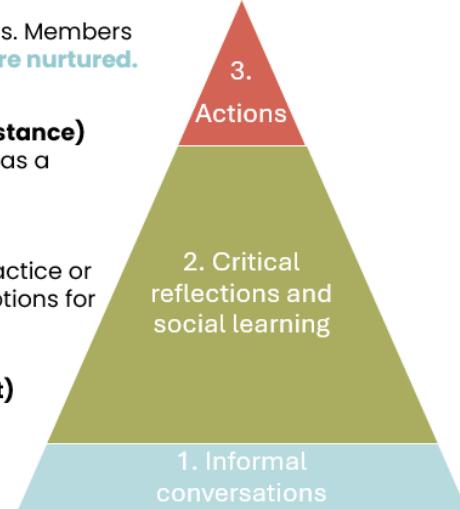
Members reflect on specific practice or resource provided as a provocation (it could be an article, video, learning activity, pedagogical tool etc).

Members share their experiences and questions on the practice or resource, including what worked or not and why, and adaptions for context. **This is where the social learning happens.**

3. Actions and key takeaways for their practice (the point)

- Insights on what to do/avoid; further resources
- Jointly determine the provocation for next session
- Confirm time and host for next session.

This is the launchpad for practice change.



This supports deep, collaborative inquiry, and the development of practical tools and strategies that are directly relevant to educators’ and educational leaders’ work every day.

Through these regular connections and critical reflections, trust between members grows – as does a bank of collective knowledge and practice. Each member (and facilitator) grows a deeper understanding of their professional practices, including the ‘why’ behind their practice and how to



apply practices across different service settings, with different groups of children, and for different parents of the curriculum.

Members and facilitators then take strengthened knowledge and practices back into their learning environments, sharing this knowledge and evidence base with their colleagues. It's just the beginning of a chain reaction of continuous improvement across the service, the educational system, and for children's educational outcomes.



What is required of an LEQ CoP member?

- You'll meet with your CoP five times over four months (March to June) for a maximum of two working hours each. This will be during work hours.
- Come prepared to critically reflect on your professional practice, openly and respectfully share your experiences, and ask and discuss questions.
- Look to apply your takeaways back in your service, and with your colleagues.
- Enjoy catering provided by LEQ.

Do Facilitators need to be experts already, or will they be able to access training?

Facilitators do not need to be experts, or public speakers! You simply need to be comfortable encouraging others to share their experiences and questions, and feel comfortable sharing your own. Everyone in the CoP – Facilitators and Members – learn together.

LEQ will also provide short, targeted training and resources to the Facilitators so they are equipped to encourage and nurture trust and connections among CoP members, and to prompt critical reflection in a supportive way.

Do I have to take part?

No, you don't have to join. This professional learning experience is completely voluntary. But, if you choose to join the initiative, you'll not only be bettering your own professional practice, but also supporting professional learning for others in your CoP as well as colleagues in the classroom.

What are the outcomes of CoPs?

The evidence base for CoPs in education and early childhood is significant – and growing more and more each day.

While benefits are strongest for participants, short- and long-term benefits also extend to colleagues, children in the services, and the whole system.

Members and facilitators of education and care CoPs see benefits through:

- ✓ Greater understanding of effective, evidence-based practices
- ✓ More sharing in colleagues' experience, strategies and insights (especially from different settings)



- ✓ Fewer gaps or misunderstandings which can happen when someone reflects alone
- ✓ A shared understanding of effective pedagogy and practices
- ✓ Feeling a stronger sense of professional identity and belonging
- ✓ New connections and friends from other Early Years services – a larger professional network



- ✓ **Strengthen quality (Meeting to Exceeding, and Exceeding to Excellent)**

For Lutheran Education Queensland as a system, the greatest benefit is the opportunity to continuously improve the quality of our educational services through empowered, supported and connected early childhood professionals (and, in turn, improving outcomes for children).

“The most important thing I learned is that there is a community of enthusiastic amazing educators that are lifelong learners, always evolving their practice and learning from each other and from me. That was the kind of teacher I wanted to be.”
– a CoP participant

What will each CoPs focus on? Will each CoP get to choose their area of focus?

Focus areas of CoPs in Australian early childhood education and care settings vary widely, reflecting the differing goals and priorities of each CoP and organisation. Examples of focus areas include language and literacy development, social-emotional development, inclusion and supporting diverse learners, curriculum planning and assessment (and more).

For this LEQ initiative, each CoP will choose the practice or practices they want to focus on within broader parameters set by LEQ. For example, under the broad parameter of ‘Quality Area 1 – Education Program and Practice’, your CoP might choose to focus in on ‘using the planning cycle’.

In this LEQ initiative, meetings will be facilitated by educational leaders from LEQ Early Years Services, with guidance and support provided by LEQ and expert consultants.

Why is this project such a powerful and strategic opportunity for early childhood professionals working in an LEQ Early Years Service?

This project represents LEQ’s intentional, significant investment in professional excellence.

By providing educators and educational leaders with the opportunity to access a CoP, LEQ is creating conditions for ongoing and sustained improvements in service quality, educator confidence, and consistency of practice, so that all children can have the best start to inspired learning for life.



Stronger practice leads to better outcomes for staff and children, helping Services to articulate their Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) and to put these plans into action, in every room, every day.