Fostering Communities of Practice to Promote Student Success

Richard Parr, Ed.D.
Executive Director
Rice University
School Mathematics Project

Anne Papakonstantinou, Ed.D.
Director
Rice University
School Mathematics Project

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Questions for You to Consider

- What communities (educational or non-educational) have you been a part of that have been particularly meaningful to you?
- How did you become a member of these communities?
- Are you still an active member? Why or why not?

Overview

- Defining Learning Communities
- Benefits of Communities of Practice
- Fostering Communities of Practice
- RUSMP's Communities of Practice
- Using Communities of Practice to Promote Student Success
- Developing Teacher Leadership through Communities of Practice

Defining Learning Communities

Communities of practice are "groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise."

Wenger and Snyder (2004)

Defining Learning Communities

A **Professional Learning Community** exists when "educators [create] an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone."

Dufour and Eaker (1998)

Differences: Membership

Communities of Practice

Membership is voluntary and fluid.

Professional Learning Communities

Membership is mandatory; part of one's job duties.

Blankenship and Ruona, 2007

Differences: Leadership

Communities of Practice

Leadership comes from both formal and informal leaders from both within and outside of the community.

Professional Learning Communities

The principal is the leader and shares decision making as appropriate.

Blankenship and Ruona, 2007

Differences: Organizational Culture

Communities of Practice

Organization values innovation and knowledge sharing.

Professional Learning Communities

Shared mission, vision, and values drive the work of the community.

Blankenship and Ruona, 2007

Differences: Knowledge Sharing

Communities of Practice

Occurs mainly within the community but some knowledge is shared across communities.

Professional Learning Communities

Team members collaborate to share knowledge within the team but structures for formal knowledge sharing across teams may not exist.

Blankenship and Ruona, 2007

Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice are ***both*** important.

School leaders and teachers should work with organizations outside of the school to support Professional Learning Communities and develop meaningful Communities of Practice.

Benefits of Communities of Practice

- Problem solving
- Requests for information
- Seeking experience
- Re-using assets

http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

Benefits of Communities of Practice

- Coordination and strategy
- Building an argument
- Developing confidence

http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

Benefits of Communities of Practice

- Discussing developments
- Documenting projects
- Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps

http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

Fostering a Community of Practice

To be successful, Communities of Practice must:

- be relevant to community members,
- be meaningful to community members, and
- provide multiple opportunities for engagement.

Reflection and Discussion

- What have you done to foster professional learning communities and communities of practice in your school and district?
- What has been effective? What has been ineffective?

RUSMP's Communities of Practice

- Designed based on needs of teachers
- Grounded in teachers' classroom practice
- Fostered through a variety of face-to-face and online methods

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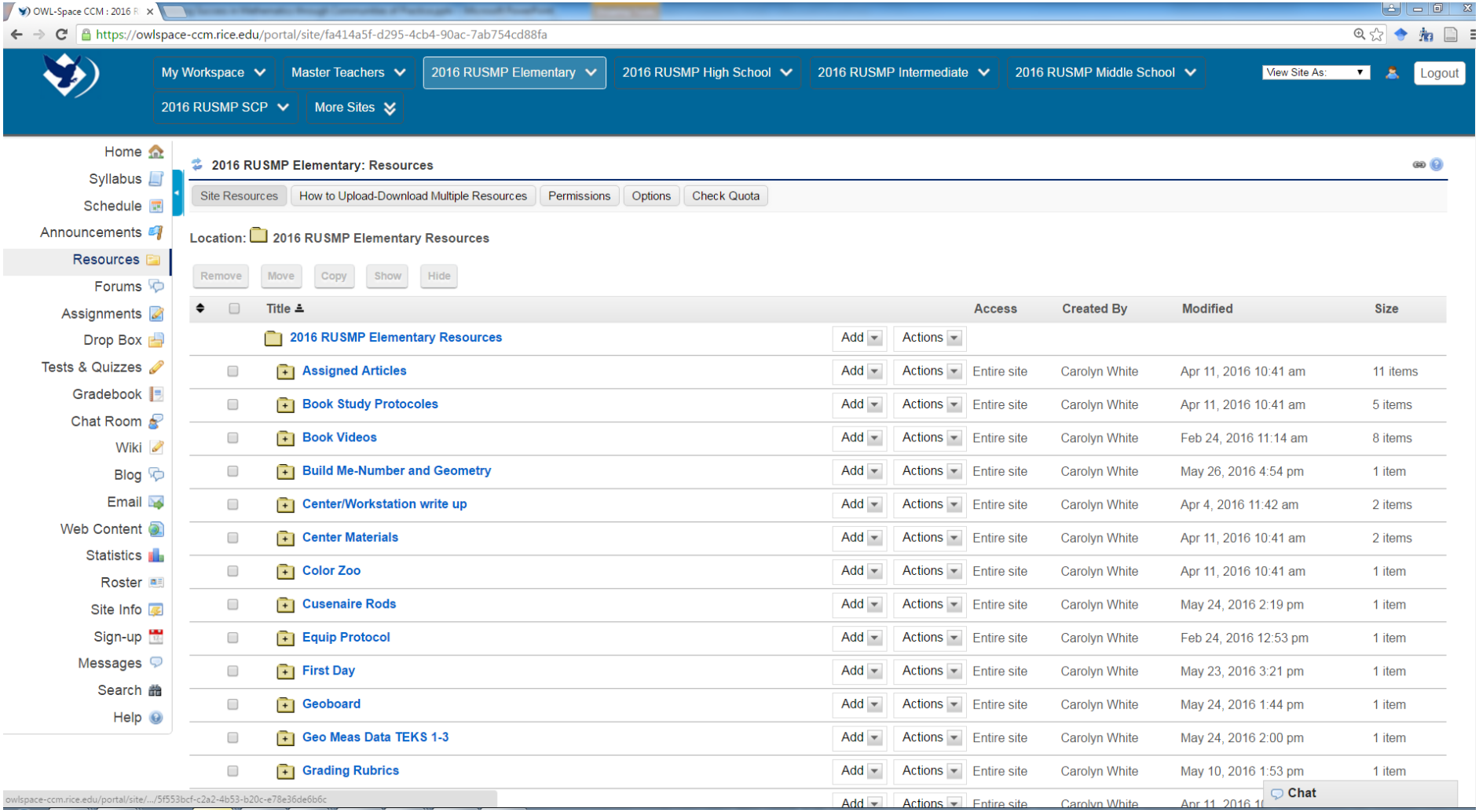
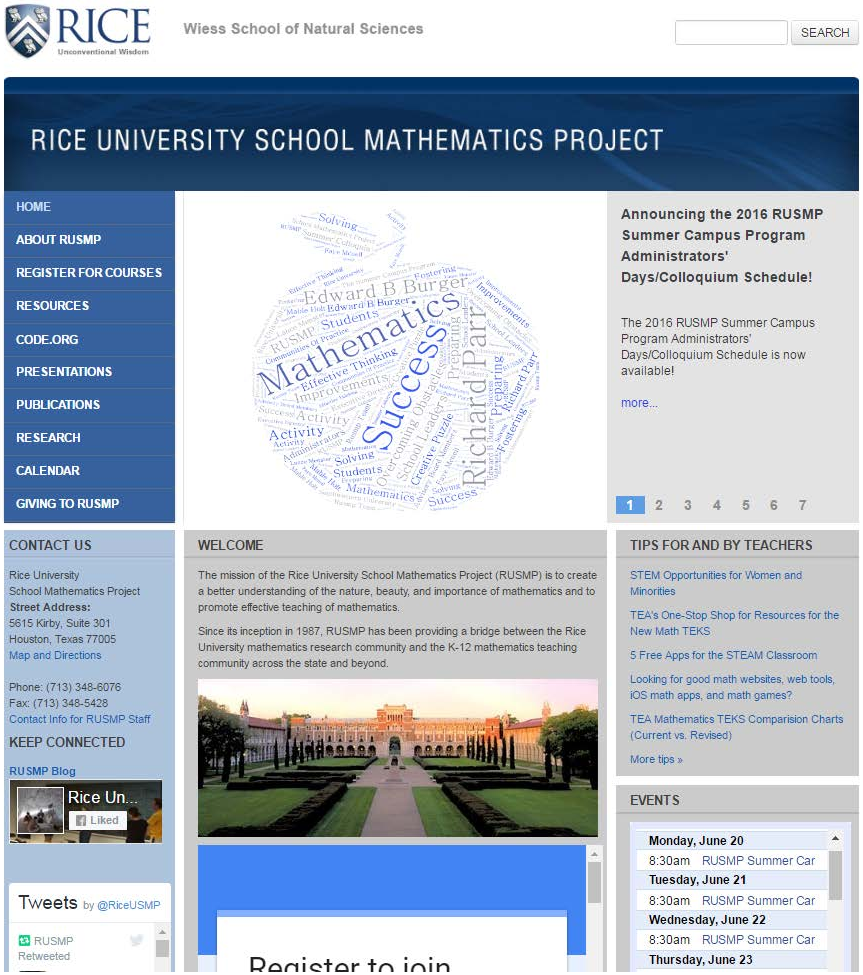
RUSMP's Communities of Practice



RUSMP's Communities of Practice



http://rusmp.rice.edu

Using Communities of Practice to Promote Student Success

"Collaboration definitely enriches my practice. When teachers have the time to reflect and discuss their practice with other teachers, it lends itself to the sharing of ideas, and sparks creativity. All teachers have a few tools in their tool kits that are worth sharing. Collaboration gives teachers the opportunity to learn new ideas, pedagogy, new strategies, new activities, and techniques to use in class."

Summer Campus Program participant

Using Communities of Practice to Promote Student Success

"This really helps with my confidence first and foremost. To have a group of teachers who have been through the program and are willing to continue to build each other to become better teachers. Next it provides a sounding board of ideas. I find that through these interactions I gain insight on how I can present the concepts in a better way."

Summer Campus Program participant

Using Communities of Practice to Promote Student Success

"The PLCs at my school are so jam-packed with policies and procedures that are being handed down, that we barely have time to really dialogue about content and methods for teaching. We spend a lot of time making sure that we, as a team, are ready to implement whatever new procedure is coming down. I need people who I can really talk more math with and that is what this community has given me."

Summer Campus Program participant

Developing Teacher Leadership through Communities of Practice

"I think the one aspect was the cohort model – that probably had the most effect. The fact that you were really part of a group of teachers who not only learned math content together but learned how to become leaders together and I think you know this is what you want for students in your class."

Mathematics Leadership Institute Lead Teacher

Developing Teacher Leadership through Communities of Practice

"I was very shy, I was a little afraid of talking and bringing my ideas forward, because I was thinking they will probably not like it, they may oppose it, I was more afraid of that aspect. There were times when we were kind of forced to discuss difficult situations and when I started doing that I realized, it is not that bad, I can communicate. People are receptive. I should not think they will not listen to me – they will listen to me."

Mathematics Leadership Institute Lead Teacher

Final Reflection

- What will you do to continue to build relevant and meaningful communities among educators?

- Please rate this overall session. Scale of 1-5
- Please rate the presenter. Scale of 1-5
- How well did the session meet your expectations?
- What else would you like to tell us about this session?

For more information:
Richard Parr, Ed.D.
rparr@rice.edu

Anne Papakonstantinou, Ed.D.
apapa@rice.edu

Rice University School Mathematics Project
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