



Strengthening teacher collaboration across Circle U. with communities of practice: The Language Teachers' Nexus Project

Ferran SUÑER MUÑOZ, Colleen STARRS, Erin TURNEER
UCLouvain

Marjan ASGARI
Freie Universität Bozen

Cyril BASTANÈS, Miguel GARCIA TARIFA
King's College London

Abstract

Based on social learning theories, communities of practice (CoPs) have arisen as a unique opportunity for teacher professional development. They promote collaboration on new pedagogies, strengthen professional networks, encourage reflection on teaching practices, support the adoption of pedagogical innovation, and ultimately enhance teachers' self-confidence and well-being. Against this backdrop, this paper presents the Circle U. Language Teacher Nexus (CU.LTN) project, which offers a model for fostering long-term, cross-institutional collaboration among language educators within the Circle U. University Alliance. Building on existing good teaching practices and expertise across partner institutions, the project aims to create synergies among teachers at both local and international levels within the alliance. We also report on how the project has evolved into a mid- and long-term endeavour in order to better address challenges such as differing teaching approaches and perspectives on learning, syllabus demands, and varying degrees of engagement. Most importantly, we show how the project's flexible design, which includes different types of communities of CoPs varying in depth and intensity of collaboration, has enabled adaptation to the different local ecologies of the partner institutions. The paper also reflects on how such an initiative can support the implementation of the principles of the European Profiling Grid (eGrid), particularly by promoting collaborative professional development and integrating into the alliance's existing professional development frameworks.

Key words: professional development, language teaching, communities of practice, university alliances

Introduction

Communities of Practice (CoPs) can help tackle challenges on diverse levels, develop innovative concepts and test them in a timely and realistic manner, while including participants who might otherwise be among minorities. CoPs offer the opportunity to dedicate our heads, hearts and hands to a collective interest and a shared vision (Devis-Rozental 2017, p. 168). Studies have shown that CoPs are particularly successful when they receive support from various institutions and can communicate their results to the outside world. Action researchers are therefore encouraged to make their actions public instead of keeping their experiences and valuable knowledge to themselves (Altrichter et al., 2018, p. 12). Accordingly, high-quality professional activity requires the willingness and ability to test the validity of experiences and knowledge by making them available to their respective professional community. A CoP can help in this process to come together across silos, because a shared identity is collectively developed with the aim to positively influence practice, while hierarchies or formal meetings are leveraged (Devis-Rozental & Clarke, 2024). A strategy for building a strong CoP is to inquire about shared interests and shared visions with a strong focus on the necessary actions to improve practice (Bultoc, 2024, p. 96). By repeatedly translating reflection into action and vice versa, knowledge and action repertoires can be expanded, differentiated and improved over time in an iterative process.

In our paper, we present the concept of the Language Teachers' Nexus, a project that aims to establish a sustainable network of CoPs for language educators. This initiative seeks to promote collaboration across institutions and linguistic contexts so that teachers can jointly reflect on their practices, share innovative approaches, and co-create pedagogical resources. This article first introduces the key concepts of CoPs. It then explores their role in professional development. Next, it examines the challenges of implementing teacher collaboration in language centres and finally focuses on the Circle U. Language Teachers' Nexus (CU.LTN), including the concept behind the CoP and the implementation phases.

1. Communities of practice (CoP): Key concepts

As Li et al. (2009) point out in the health care field, because the "Community of Practice" is an "evolving concept," it can be difficult to determine what does and does not constitute a CoP. However, some authors have identified key characteristics that help to clarify the concept. Following Wenger's notion (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139), a CoP is defined as "a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise". CoPs can therefore be generally characterized by "a group, shared interests, a concern with practice (doing), regular interaction, and learning" (Borg, 2023, p. 72). An example of such a CoP is the *Exploring & Enacting Holistic Language Pedagogies (HLP) Project*, which brought

together 52 language educators from Ukraine and the United States who were willing to share their experiences and collaboratively explore the effectiveness of holistic language pedagogies. To foster connections and collaboration among participants, the community of practice offered a series of workshops, webinars, and other meetings over an 11-month period, with the aim of sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices.¹

Borg (2023) specifies that, in the educational field, CoPs are often referred to as “professional learning communities” (PLCs) and “teacher communities”. According to Vangrieken et al. (2017), PLCs and CoPs draw upon different theories (“learning organization theory” for PLC and “social or situated learning theory” for CoP) but share similar goals and collaborative practices for professional learning, making their boundaries often blurred and the terms interchangeable. Although the conditions of implementing those “teacher CoPs” may vary, Borg (2023, p. 72) notes that “literature does suggest that this form of collaborative professional development can contribute effectively to teacher change.”

Furthermore, Borg (2023) distinguishes between emergent and designed teacher CoPs. Emergent teacher CoPs reflect “the way CoPs were originally conceived of” and are “created organically and led by teachers themselves” (Borg, 2023, p. 72). Teachers come together on their own initiative in order “to help each other address their concerns and improve themselves as teachers” (Padwad & Parnham, 2019, p. 556). In contrast, designed CoPs, such as the one we are introducing in the present article, are “formally initiated (by, for example, a ministry of education or teacher development project provider)” (Borg, 2023, p. 72). The idea behind those designed CoPs is that teachers sharing a similar institutional context regularly meet and engage in discussing different aspects of their teaching practice, develop ideas and reflect together on their implementation (cf. Borg, 2023, pp. 73-74).

According to Borg (2023), the main features of such designed CoPs are as follows:

- ◆ A structure, which varies according to the context, and which “regulates the stages teachers will go through during each meeting” (p. 73).
- ◆ Often, “at least initially, a package of materials is provided for the teachers to work through (with guidance from a coordinator)” (p. 74).
- ◆ A “formalized coordinator role” whose purpose is to “support the CoP, administratively (by for example, scheduling sessions), academically (by facilitating the discussions during meetings and guiding teachers as they work through the materials), and by sustaining the group’s momentum (through stimulating teacher online interaction between meetings)” (p. 74).

Thus, for our CU.LTN CoP, and following Borg’s (2023) definition, several characteristics can be highlighted: it brings together a group of teachers with shared interests (language teaching) and a concern about practice, who engage in regular

¹ <https://ceinternational.org/cpl/holistic-pedagogies> (January 2026).

interactions (meetings) to learn about this shared practice within a structured framework (the CU.LTN), supported by coordinators who guide them at both local and international levels.

2. Communities of Practice (CoP) in Professional Development

Insights from other disciplines inform the setup of CoP in our field, particularly in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching (SLA/T). The inauguration, regenerative leadership and consensus-driven style of our CoP were informed by core theories from economics and sociology. Clarke and Clarke (2024) describe CoPs with the metaphor of a “thriving garden”. Behind this metaphor lie various aspects such as innovation, structure and creativity of CoPs. At the same time, however, the prototype of a garden that each of us has in mind is different and conditioned by cultural and individual imprints – reaching from a naturally blooming meadow to the highly structured gardens of Versailles. Different linguistic communities may conceive and conceptualize things differently and result in differences in conceptual categories. This theoretical background informed the interaction within our CoP: Different partners may have diverging ideas about how structured and organized the CoP should be, how often we should meet, and how regulated our research should be. Reflecting upon types of agency and regenerative leadership helped us to deal with these differences effectively.

Agency can range from scientific support for the CoP by providing customized recipes to expert groups providing strategic support, while it is also possible to do without scientific monitoring. Different leadership styles can have a significant impact on the perception and effectiveness of CoPs. Leaders with an autocratic orientation may be required to modify their approach to management in order to cultivate a setting that encourages open communication and cooperative engagement. Conversely, those who adopt a consensus-driven style might need to incorporate elements of structure and direction to maintain the effectiveness and goal-orientation of CoPs (Clarke & Clarke 2024, p. 60).

Transformational Leadership (TFL) is a visionary and supportive leadership approach that encourages individuals to transcend personal interests in pursuit of collective organizational goals. This style is typified by four core behavioural dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Matsunaga, 2024). Regenerative Leadership emphasizes cultivating meaning, practicing attentive observation, engaging in deep listening, and fostering generative dialogue (Hardman, 2012). The notion of regeneration has gained traction across multiple disciplines and generally refers to processes that restore, renew, or revitalize ecosystems, communities, or social systems (Das & Bocken, 2024, p. 530). Research suggests that effective leadership enhances receptiveness

to organizational change (Yue et al., 2019). Regenerative business models expand the traditional focus on minimizing harm (typically captured by the concept of the environmental footprint) by also accounting for their potential to generate positive ecological or social outcomes, referred to as the ‘handprint.’ This concept underscores the interconnection between economic activities and ecological well-being (Hahn & Tampe, 2021; Konietzko et al., 2023). The handprint is quantitatively defined as the 1) environmental impact avoided by substituting a conventional product, service, or behaviour with a more sustainable alternative, minus 2) the impact of the new solution itself (Norris et al., 2021). The overarching aim is to achieve a net positive impact, where the positive effects (handprint) outweigh the negative impacts (footprint) of an organization’s activities (Norris, 2015; Norris et al., 2021).

A regenerative business strategy particularly well-suited for evaluating the alignment of digitalization initiatives with the core values and strengths of an organization is Appreciative Inquiry. According to Cooperrider et al. (2008, p. 4), Appreciative Inquiry constitutes a method of organizational inquiry that deliberately identifies, emphasizes, and illuminates the organization’s positive core. Rather than focusing on problems or deficits, this approach fosters a generative process of collective learning and organizational development by recognizing what works well within systems such as departments, language centres, or broader institutional structures. Appreciative Inquiry serves as both a framework for strategic reflection and a method for uncovering moments when organizations are at their most dynamic, effective, and resilient – particularly in relation to their broader network of stakeholders and users. This is operationalized through the 5-D cycle, comprising the stages of Definition, Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Each phase contributes to a deeper understanding of organizational potential and creates the foundation for meaningful and sustainable transformation. At the same time, this approach allows for strategic risk management, which constitutes an integral part of a successful CoP.

3. Challenges in Implementing Teacher Collaboration at language centres

Implementing designed CoPs within and across language centres presents various challenges. As outlined in the previous section, embracing flexible leadership, shared agency, and strength-based approaches is key to fostering effective CoP. However, their practical implementation often involves additional challenges arising from the different idiosyncrasies and contextual factors that each teacher (and language centre) brings to the collaboration. This section outlines some of these challenges, based on our experience as practitioners.

3.1. Differing teaching approaches and perspectives on learning

One of the most significant challenges in teacher collaboration stems from differing pedagogical beliefs about how foreign languages are learned and how they should be taught. These beliefs, forged by diverse professional experiences and academic backgrounds, constitute each instructor's unique teaching style, shaping their day-to-day practices (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). With the advent of Artificial Intelligence and its gradual integration into education, new challenges and points of contention have emerged, further widening the gap between differing views on language pedagogy. Moreover, teachers are continually adapting to the specific and evolving ecology of their classrooms, where multiple variables converge, including students' needs, course profiles, and syllabus requirements.

Given this reality, when innovative practices were presented at the CU.LTN kick-off event at UCLouvain last year, some proposals were met with scepticism. Practitioners' initial reactions were naturally influenced by how well these practices aligned with their underlying pedagogical perspectives and teaching contexts, which in some cases led to disengagement and lack of interest.

This challenge must be addressed by fostering an open and receptive mindset among teachers within the community of practice. As Mercieca (2017) highlights, CoPs thrive not through uniformity, but through productive tensions. These differences stimulate critical dialogue and an adaptation process, which are essential not only for refining the practice itself but also for nurturing learning and professional growth. From this perspective, diverse teaching approaches and educational settings, when managed respectfully and purposefully, become a catalyst for development rather than an obstacle. This has been the case with one of the practices presented at the inaugural event in Louvain last year, focusing on the integration of chatbots in language teaching. When colleagues from UCLouvain and King's Language Centre adapted and implemented it in their teaching environments, they encountered difficulties and pitfalls that sparked fruitful discussions. As a result of this exchange, the practice was further refined, evolving into a more effective and integrated resource within the digital ecosystem at the King's Language Centre.

It is therefore essential that the coordinators of the CoP cultivate this perspective, so that its members view these differences as a source of growth and recognise that the key value of exploring practices together lies in the dialogue and synergies they foster.

3.2. Time constraints, syllabus demands, and different degrees of engagement

Another challenge that CoPs face in large language centres is the constraint imposed by heavy workloads and institutional demands. Syllabus requirements further compound this issue. In many language programs, particularly those geared toward exam preparation, there is limited flexibility to experiment with non-standard or innovative activities. As a result, some teachers question whether the practices proposed are feasible in their tightly structured, often high-stakes learning environments.

These constraints lead to varying levels of involvement within the CoP. While some colleagues take on active roles, others engage only sporadically due to time, workload pressures as well as diverging formal time allocation for participating in a CoP (structural constraints, departmental organization, etc.). This has been a common reality since the beginning of Language Teacher' Nexus project and has been addressed by promoting different types of communities of practice, embracing flexible leadership and acknowledging both individual limitations and varying degrees of participation.

3.3. Developing Collaborative Ecosystems: Local and Cross-Institutional Communication

Establishing a collaborative space for practitioners to share their best practices, participate asynchronously, and communicate effectively presents several challenges, particularly across language centres in different European universities. While some digital tools offer potential for creating hubs that support both asynchronous and synchronous collaboration, implementing these solutions is not always straightforward. Variations in institutional policies and familiarity with digital platforms can hinder the use of such hubs among CoP members from different partner universities. Additionally, some institutions restrict the use of their internal platforms due to privacy or administrative concerns, making it harder to establish a consistent, cross-institutional space for collaboration. In the CUL.TN project we have addressed this issue by setting up a dedicated space in Microsoft Teams that allows us to grant access to colleagues from other institutions in Circle U. Other hubs on SharePoint and Viva Engage are also being used to coordinate locally, as it is the case at the King's Language Centre.

Even when technical access is available, encouraging active engagement remains a significant challenge, due to the constraints mentioned above. Participating in meetings, especially when work schedules vary so widely, or navigating files shared on the hub, can be perceived as an additional burden rather than a support. As a result, participation may remain limited to a small group of highly motivated individuals.

Building on the challenges discussed, ranging from differing pedagogical perspectives and time constraints to institutional and technological hurdles, it becomes clear that developing collaborative ecosystems requires thoughtful and sustained effort. Despite these obstacles, structured and well-supported initiatives can help cultivate meaningful and sustainable communities of practice. One such initiative is the CU.LTN project. Developed by the Circle U. Multilingualism, Interculturality and Language Lab (CU.mil), it offers a promising model for long-term, cross-institutional collaboration among language educators. The following section introduces the concept, structure, and goals of this initiative and explores how it seeks to support teacher growth and innovation in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.



Figure 1. *The Circle U. partner universities*

4. The Circle U. Language Teachers' Nexus

4.1. The Concept

The CU. Language Teachers' Nexus (CU.LTN) is an initiative of the Circle U. Multilingualism, Interculturality and Language Lab (CU.mil). It aims to support the creation of CoPs among language educators both at the local level and across the alliance. More specifically, it provides a space for language teachers to collaborate, engage in lifelong learning, and share their knowledge and expertise. Originally conceived as a six-month initiative (from the kick-off conference in Louvain-la-Neuve in January 2025 to a follow-up conference in London in June 2025) this project has since evolved into a longer-term endeavour. Building on these first two events, it has included an online international symposium in December 2025, and will include an on-site conference entitled Language Teaching in Motion, to be held in August 2026 at the University of Vienna (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Implementation phases of the CU.LTN project*

Its extended duration offers both unique advantages and potential challenges. Acknowledging that the adoption of innovative practices develops through several stages such as recognizing, accepting, adapting, exploring, and advancing (Niess et al., 2009) and that this process can take time, CoPs offer a very suitable longitudinal approach to supporting teachers throughout these stages. This is especially true for the theme chosen for the first phase of the project: Artificial Intelligence (AI) in language education. In fact, teachers are sensitive to hype cycles unfolding in their local contexts and may go through different phases, as described by O'Leary (2008): the peak of inflated expectations, the trough of disillusionment, the slope of enlightenment, and the plateau of productivity. It is also important to recognize the risks of ideological bias in how AI is perceived and implemented in schools. As Jones (2024) asserts,

Ideology is important because negative outlook can prevent the schools from benefiting from the AIED [Artificial Intelligence in Education], while an overly optimistic approach will lead adopters to miss serious concerns that must be addressed if AIED is to benefit and not harm institutions, communities, and learners” (p. 70f.).

Against this backdrop, this section describes the objectives of CU.LTN, its structure and its integration into existing professional development frameworks of the Circle U. alliance.

4.1.1. Building collaborative learning ecosystems

CU.LTN aims to facilitate collaboration between teachers and/or researchers from different locations and to foster partnerships for new initiatives. This enables participants to work with other peers on developing, fine-tuning, adjusting and implementing innovative practices around a chosen theme. Sharing knowledge and experiences creates synergetic forces that allow for the enhancement of such practices and the debunking of myths around classroom dynamics, beliefs, etc. Through active participation and networking opportunities, participants are able to establish and expand their professional connections. This, in turn, strengthens teachers’ agency, i.e. their “capacity [...] to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the *growth of their colleagues*” (Calvert, 2016, p. 52; italics added).

The project also aims to promote professional development, defined as “the professional growth a teacher achieves in the process of gaining experience and knowledge and reflecting on his or her teaching” (European Profiling Grid, 2011). According to the European Profiling Grid (2011), preparing for and actively engaging in activities that support this development is an essential aspect of professionalism. Consequently, the project encourages participants to reflect on their own teaching practices, refine their teaching strategies, and foster their professional growth.

Furthermore, the project seeks to encourage acceptance of pedagogical innovations. Participants have the opportunity to evaluate and critique new teaching methods, encouraging both adaptability and adoption. In fact, recent research suggests that in order to make more intentional decisions regarding the adoption or rejection of AI in language education, teachers need to develop competencies in at least three key areas (Walter, 2024, p. 12ff.): AI literacy (understanding the functions and logic of AI technologies and their broader impact on society), prompt engineering (knowing how to effectively prompt AI models for specific tasks and generate appropriate responses), and critical thinking (the ability to assess AI-generated output critically and recognize potential misinformation or hallucinations). These competencies are essential for professional development and are well aligned with the educational goals set by the Council of Europe, which declared 2025 the *European Year of Digital Citizenship Education*.

Finally, CU.LTN aims to boost teachers' self-confidence. Participants develop greater confidence in implementing new teaching strategies and methodologies. Working with peers can indeed help them enhance their perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) and, consequently, their self-confidence: "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer is their commitment to them." (p. 4, see also Graham, 2022). This is supported by Bandura's (1994) theory, which highlights the role of social contexts: "social persuasion" and "vicarious experiences provided by social models" are ways of "creating and strengthening self-beliefs of efficacy" (p. 3).

4.1.2. Structure and integration with existing professional development frameworks

In order to create as many synergetic forces as possible across the different partner institutions, the CoP is coordinated both internationally, by UCLouvain, and locally; the participating universities within CU.LTN also have their own local coordinators who facilitate collaboration, organize content (e.g. on Moodle), and promote reflection while maintaining engagement and momentum. To date, the most active CoPs showing sustained activity have been those at UCLouvain (n = 15), the University of Vienna (n = 7), and King's College London (n = 13). In order to know more about the teacher profiles participating in the CoP, we conducted a survey which will be the object of further investigation. Due to the varying degrees of engagement and availability of participating members, we could not gather data on all participating teachers. Based on the data, the characteristics of the participating teachers are as follows: The target languages taught are English, French, German, Spanish, Chinese and Dutch at beginner, intermediate and advanced proficiency levels. The participating teachers are also well balanced in terms of teaching experience ranging from early career teachers (4 years of professional experience) to established teachers (up to approx. 40 years of professional experience). Local coordinators at the other partner universities are keen to set up similar CoPs. In order to increase opportunities for interaction among participants, CU.LTN has adopted a hybrid format: It combines both in-person components (the kick-off event at UCLouvain, the follow-up conference at King's College, the upcoming conference in Vienna and in-person meeting with members of local CoPs) with online components (local CoP online meetings, online meetings with all local coordinators, and online training sessions with external experts).

Designed to be flexible, CU.LTN offers different formats that vary in the depth and intensity of collaboration that best adapt to local ecologies, going from *Basic Community of Practice* to *Pioneer Community*. This allows participants to get involved at their own pace (see Table 1). For example, participants in a basic CoP might engage in one single meeting in order to decide which best practices they want to implement and how they want to follow up on this afterwards remotely and/or asynchronously. In contrast, participants in a pioneer CoP may not only meet several times but they also

may undertake some peer observation, meet with other CoPs and disseminate insights within their immediate professional environment.

Table 1. *Typology of communities of practice within CU.TLN*

Type of Community of practice	Single meeting	Follow-up meeting	Peer observation	Cross-country meetings	Internal dissemination
Basic community of practice	☑				
Advanced community of practice	☑	☑			
Pro community of practice	☑	☑	☑		
Master community of practice	☑	☑	☑	☑	
Pioneer community of practice	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑

It is worth noting that CU.LTN is also consistent with the principles of the European Profiling Grid (eGrid), particularly in the way it promotes collaborative professional development. The eGrid highlights the importance of peer learning and shared expertise, for instance, by encouraging teachers to “act as mentor[s] to less experienced colleagues” and to “organise opportunities for colleagues to observe one another” (eGrid, 2011, Phase 3, Professional Conduct, p. 4). CU.LTN supports similar forms of engagement with the CoP by creating a space where members exchange ideas, reflect together on their teaching, and contribute to mutual growth. In addition, the eGrid values teachers who “prepare for and participate actively in professional development activities” (p. 4), which resonates with the CU.LTN objectives described above.

CU.LTN integrates into the existing professional development frameworks of the Circle U. alliance, as it fosters connections and the sharing of knowledge between people, in a similar way to other Circle U. activities such as Open Conversations (hybrid conferences) or the Open Campus, a virtual university campus where students can find all of the joint offers developed by the nine partner universities (hackathons, on-site and online courses, summer schools, etc.).

4.2 Phases of implementation

Establishing a CoP is a step-by-step process that requires careful preparation and planning. This is especially true for a CoP that encompasses participants within a European University alliance, in this case Circle U. In addition to meticulous preparation and planning, the engagement of motivated colleagues who are willing to participate in the CoP is of paramount importance. In this section we will describe the implementation phases that were followed when forming CU.LTN.

4.2.1. Phase 1: Needs assessment and stakeholder engagement

In the previous section, the importance of a CoP for language teachers was outlined – collaboration between peers, engagement in lifelong learning, sharing of knowledge and expertise, fostering acceptance of pedagogical innovations and boosting self-confidence. The ultimate goal of CU.LTN is to create a CoP for language teachers across the Circle U. alliance where teachers from the partner universities can engage in the aforementioned practices.

To this end, we set about identifying key stakeholders (directors from the language institutes, Circle U. academic chairs, etc.) at the different partner universities with the aim of finding colleagues who would be interested in becoming the local coordinator for the CoP at their respective university.

In order to create a CoP across the alliance, it was deemed essential to first establish a CoP at the local level which would be facilitated by a local coordinator. Accordingly, the role of the local coordinator would include the dissemination of information about the CoP and associated events, the facilitation of the CoP at the local level and engagement with the local coordinators from partner universities.

4.2.2. Phase 2: Establishing the CoP framework and local coordinator training

Having identified the local coordinators, the next phase of the implementation process commenced. In addition to frequent correspondence by email, a series of online meetings were held with the local coordinators to outline the background to CU.LTN, to explain the scope, to clarify the role of the local coordinators, to respond to any queries they had and to seek their collaboration with the kick-off event to officially launch CU.LTN.

During these briefing sessions, local coordinators were informed that they were free to decide the frequency and intensity of their local CoP (cf. Table 1, section 4.1.2.). This was important so as to illustrate the level of flexibility and autonomy that CoPs afford, and to prevent local coordinators and participants from feeling overburdened.

One of the online meetings consisted more particularly in a training session which aimed to equip the local coordinators with some guidelines for the implementation of

the CoP at the local level. Topics covered included leadership and agency, activities and process, SMART goals, risk mitigation and celebrating successes.

4.2.3. Phase 3: Launch and facilitation

CU.LTN was officially launched at a 3-day event hosted by the CU.mil at UCLouvain in January 2025 which brought together different actors from the field of language learning: language teachers, researchers, lecturers and students.

The theme chosen for the kick-off event was *Mobilising language learners and teachers*. In addition to exploring the relationships between technologies and language learning in the mobile era, participants also had the opportunity to showcase their teaching and research practices and learn about other good practices.

In order to facilitate the implementation of CU.LTN, an Open Conversation (hybrid conference) on ‘The Power of Teacher Collaboration’ set the scene by underlining the importance of CoPs for language teachers. It was followed by an interactive *show and tell* session where participants discovered new pedagogical approaches and good practices. During this session, the following practical resources for classroom implementation were presented:

- ◆ Using AI in writing workshops in Dutch and English: Improving writing skills with AI tools: feedback
- ◆ Helping language learners build effective study systems in the AI era
- ◆ The use of technology-enhanced experiential learning to teach LSP English in Higher Education
- ◆ Empowering Student Presentations with AI Tools: How can artificial intelligence tools be used in the classroom with students to prepare an oral presentation
- ◆ From Translation to Reflection: A case study on AI tools in advanced L2 learning of Danish and Chinese

At the end of the session, participants selected one of the good practices to try out in their classes and registered for the local branch of the CoP at their home university.

The facilitation stage is currently underway, both at the local level and the Circle U. level. At the local level, local coordinators have disseminated information about CU.LTN and the pedagogical practices showcased at the kick-off event. Language teachers who expressed an interest in participating in CU.LTN are experimenting with the aforementioned practices and regular meetings are organised to facilitate the sharing of experiences and collaboration among peers.

At the alliance level, regular meetings with the local coordinators provide a framework for discussion and exchange of ideas. They offer the local coordinators the opportunity to raise any challenges they might be facing and allow for success stories to be highlighted.

Steps have also been taken to promote engagement and synergies across Circle U. All participants have been provided with a list of colleagues from partner universities

who registered for certain practices so as to encourage cross-institutional collaboration. Moreover, a dedicated space on Microsoft Teams has been created to foster this collaboration, which can be either asynchronous or synchronous in nature.

4.2.4 Phase 4: Evaluation and sustainability

Based on recent research highlighting the importance of institutional support in determining the success of a CoP (Bultoc, 2024, p. 101), several attempts have been made to promote CU.LTN at both an institutional and cross-institutional level.

To start, a follow-up to the kick-off event at UCLouvain was held at King's College in June 2025. The *Building Communities of Practice* event aimed to pave the way for future collaborative projects across the alliance and build on the work accomplished. To date, one additional online symposium was held in December 2025, and an onsite conference will take place at the University of Vienna in August 2026. In addition, to facilitate access to shared resources and to enhance collaboration among participants, plans are underway to make an open Moodle platform (with no institutional affiliation) available to all registered participants.

More interestingly, a research project is in progress to investigate the perceived learning gains of language teachers engaged in CoPs with a special focus on AI (AI being the focus of the CU.LTN kick-off event). The way in which CoPs support meaningful engagement and the relationship between engagement and perceived learning gains will also be explored.

Finally, the project leaders and local coordinators are committed to ensuring the efficacy and sustainability of CU.LTN across Circle U. Strategies to promote further reflection, sustain momentum and foster even greater collaboration and engagement at the cross-institutional level have been discussed.

Conclusions

In this section, we focus on the conclusions drawn from our experience, particularly in relation to the kick-off event at UCLouvain and the follow-up at King's College London. Following the kick-off event, we observed that the central aim of the project – providing a collaborative space for language teachers – has been met. Working groups were established based on the various activities presented during the ‘show and tell’ segment of the conference. Colleagues engaged with these CoPs in diverse ways, both through peer interaction and through engagement with shared materials, practices that are closely related to social learning theory (Stoll et al., 2006, Wenger, 2000).

Conversations occurred at both local and international levels, focusing on how these teaching practices could be adapted to fit specific institutional contexts. This exchange fostered collaborative professional development and encouraged participants to reflect critically on their own teaching methods.

The event in London contributed to highlighting innovative language teaching practices, including – but not limited to – the integration of AI. It also served as a platform to strengthen the link between research and teaching by fostering collaboration between researchers and practitioners. The goal was to build on the momentum from the first conference – raising awareness of the project within the Circle U. Alliance, promoting collaboration, and developing critical thinking skills – while expanding its reach and scope.

To ensure continued relevance and engagement, participants were invited to provide feedback on how the project can become even more accessible and impactful. This included input on effective strategies for promoting active participation and suggestions for future topics of interest, both crucial pre-conditions for a successful CoP (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). Adjustments were made in response to this feedback, e.g. through the organization of a series of ongoing events, both online and in-person, aimed at supporting the continued growth and vitality of these communities of practice and further adapting to evolving institutional, pedagogical, and professional contexts across the Circle U. alliance.

References

- Altrichter, H., Posch, P., & Spann, H. (2018). *Lehrerinnen und Lehrer Erforschen Ihren Unterricht. Unterrichtsentwicklung und Unterrichtsevaluation durch Aktionsforschung*. Verlag Julius Klinkhardt, utb.
- Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V. S. Ramachaudran (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of human behavior* (Vol. 4, pp. 71-81). Academic Press. (Reprinted in H. Friedman [Ed.], *Encyclopedia of mental health*. Academic Press, 1998.)
- Borg, S. (2023). Teacher communities of practice. In L. Wei, Z. Hua, & J. Simpson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (2nd ed., pp. 215-228). Routledge.
- Bultoc, D. (2024). Enabling organisational change and strategic alignment, disrupting hierarchies and mapping career pathways through communities of practice. In C. Devis-Rozental, & S. R. Clarke (Eds.), *Building communities of practice in higher education: Co-creating, collaborating and enriching working cultures* (pp. 86-105). Taylor & Francis.
- Calvert, L. (2016). The power of teacher agency. *Journal of Staff Development*, 37(2), 51-56. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/power-teacher-agency/docview/1912117672/se-2>
- Clarke, K., & Clarke, S. R. (2024). Cultivating knowledge. In C. Devis-Rozental, & S. Clarke (Eds.), *Building communities of practice in higher education co-*

- creating, collaborating and enriching working cultures* (pp. 49-66). Taylor & Francis.
- Cooperrider, D. L., Whitney, D. K., & Stavros, J. M. (2008). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: For leaders of change* (2nd ed.). Crown Custom Publishing.
- Das, A., & Bocken, N. (2024). Regenerative business strategies: A database and typology to inspire business experimentation towards sustainability. *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, 49, 529-544. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2024.06.024>
- Devis-Rozental, C. (2017). *Developing socio-emotional intelligence in early years scholars* [Doctoral thesis, Bournemouth University]. Bournemouth University Research Online. https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/29594/1/DEVIS-ROZENTAL%2C%20Camila_D.Prof._2017.pdf
- Devis-Rozental, C., & Clarke, S. (Eds.). (2024). *Building communities of practice in higher education: co-creating, collaborating and enriching working cultures*. Taylor & Francis.
- European Profiling Grid. (2011). *The European Profiling Grid*. EQUALS.
- Graham, S. (2022). Self-efficacy and language learning – what it is and what it isn't. *The Language Learning Journal*, 50(2), 186-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2045679>
- Hardman, J. (2012). *Leading for regeneration: Going beyond sustainability in business, education, and community*. Routledge.
- Hahn, T. & Tampe, M. (2021). Strategies for regenerative business. *Strategic Organization* 19(3), 456-477.
- Jones, J. W. (2024). AI in education: Some thoughts about ethics, equity, and social impact. In D. Kourkoulou, A. O. Tzirides, B. Cope, & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Trust and inclusion in AI-mediated education* (pp. 59-72). Springer Cham.
- Konietzko, J., Das, A., & Bocken, N. (2023). Towards regenerative business models: A necessary shift? *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, 38(2023), 372-388.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques and principles in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Li, L. C., Grimshaw, J. M., Nielsen, C., Judd, M., Coyte, P. C., Graham, I. D. (2009). Evolution of Wenger's concept of community of practice. *Implementation Science*, 4, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-4-11>
- Matsunaga, M. (2024). Transformational Leadership in a Digital Era. In M. Matsunaga (Ed.), *Employee Uncertainty Over Digital Transformation* (pp. 85-138). Springer.

- Mercieca, B. (2017). What Is a Community of Practice? In J. McDonald, & A. Cater-Steel (Eds.), *Communities of Practice* (pp. 3-25). Springer Singapore.
- Niess, M. L., Ronau, R. N., Shafer, K. G., Driskell, S. O., Harper, S. R., Johnston, C., Browning, C., Özgün-Koca, S. A., & Kersaint, G. (2009). Mathematics Teacher TPACK Standards and Development Model. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 9(1), 4-24.
- Norris, G. (2015). *Handprint-based netpositive assessment*. Sustainability and health initiative for NetPositive Enterprise (SHINE), Center for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health.
- Norris, G. A., Burek, J., Moore, E. A., Kirchain, R. E., & Gregory, J. (2021). Sustainability health initiative for NetPositive Enterprise handprint methodological framework. *The international journal of life cycle assessment*, 26(3), 528-542.
- O’Leary, D. E. (2008). Gartner’s Hype Cycle and information system research issues. *International Journal of Accounting Information Systems*, 9, 240-252.
- Padwad, A., & Parnham, J. (2019). Teacher networks in the wild: Alternative ways of professional development. In S. Walsh & S. Mann (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English language teacher education* (pp. 553-569). Routledge.
- Probst, G., & Borzillo, S. (2008). Why communities of practice succeed and why they fail. *European Management Journal*, 26(5), 335-347.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7(4), 221-258. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8>
- Wenger, E. (2000).
- Vangrieken, K., Meredith, C., Packer, T., & Kyndt, E. (2017). Teacher communities as a context for professional development: A systematic review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 61, 47-59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.10.001>
- Walter, Y. (2024). Embracing the future of artificial intelligence in the classroom: The relevance of AI literacy, prompt engineering, and critical thinking in modern education. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 21, Article 15.
- Wenger, E. C., & Snyder, W. M. (2000). Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(1), 139-45.
- Wenger E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization*, 7(2), 225-246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840072002>