Featured Presenters

Corin Gray

Susan Hester

John Kanady

Reimagining teaching teams as communities of practice—a cross-disciplinary perspective

Inside U of A-Funded Scholarship

March 25, 2026

1:00-2:00pm

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Center for University Education Scholarship

Land Acknowledgement

Reimagining teaching teams as communities of practice—a cross-disciplinary perspective

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Introductions

Featured Presenters

Corin Gray

Susan Hester

John Kanady

Featured Panelists

Sarah Grace

Maggie Keef

Laura Van Dorn

Guadalupe (Guada) Lozano
Director and Endowed Chair, CUES
Director, External Relations, School of Mathematical Sciences
Research Professor of Mathematics

2024 CUES Spanning Boundaries (SB) Team

View CUES Project Page

From Top Left:

- **Corin Gray**, *Molecular & Cellular Biology, Science*
- **Arin Haverland**, *Environmental Science, CALES*
- **Emily Dykstra**, *Molecular & Cellular Biology, Science*
- **Susan Hester,** *Molecular & Cellular Biology, Science*
- **Sarah Grace**, *Psychology, Science*
- **Elizabeth Eadie**, *Anthropology, SBS*
- **John Kanady,** *Physiology, COM-T*
- **Daniel McNabney,** *Physiology, COM-T*
- **Lisa Rezende,** *Molecular & Cellular Biology, Science*
- **Allyson Roof,** *Physiology, COM-T*
- **Alma Tejeda Padron,** *Psychology, Science*
- **Laura Van Dorn,** *Chemistry & Biochemistry, Science*

Thank you CUES & CUES SB Team Members!

2024 CUES Spanning Boundaries (SB) Team

View CUES Project Page

Talk Outline:

- CUES SB Project Overview
- Introduction to Teaching Teams
- Theoretical Framework
- Research Questions & Design
- Data walk through
- Questions?
- Faculty Learning Community (FLC) Introduction
- FLC Panel

Reimagining teaching teams as communities of practice—a cross-disciplinary perspective

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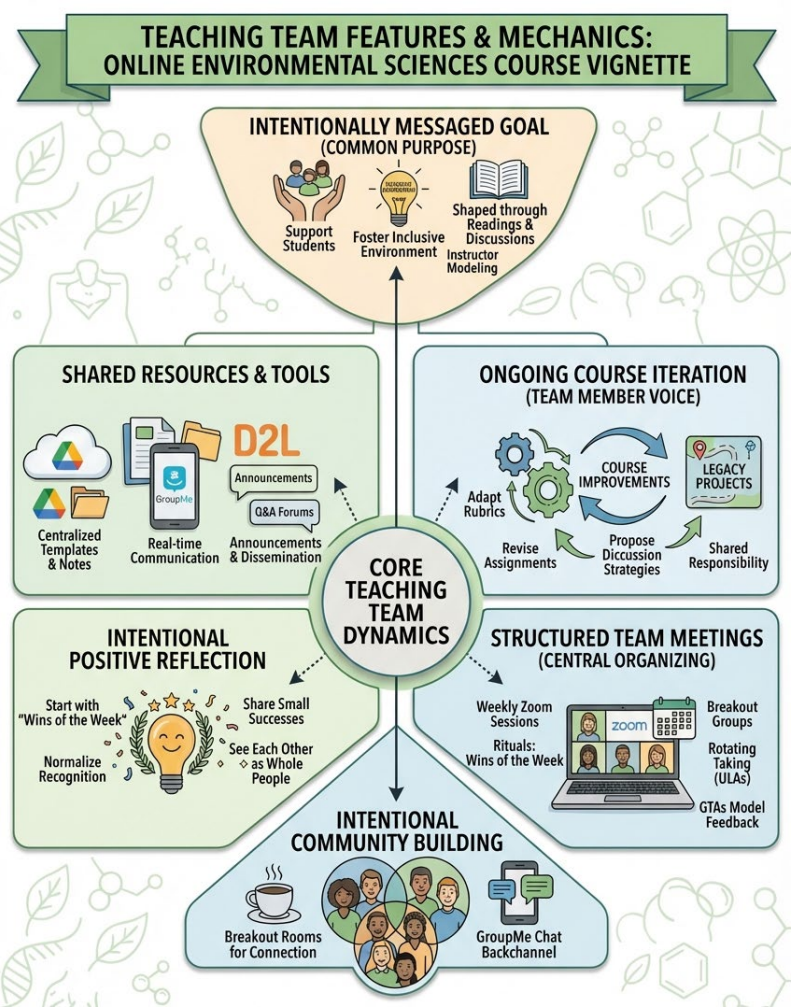

View CUES Project Page

CUES SB Project Title:
Teaching Teams as **communities** supporting belongingness and self efficacy

Project Aims:

- **Research:** Identify and define the specific psychological, pedagogical and interpersonal mechanisms that link teaching team dynamics to psychosocial impacts on teaching team (TT) members and students in TT supported classes.
- **Impact:** Develop an FLC to share evidence-based practices for re-designing Learning and Teaching Assistant roles to enhance the effectiveness of teaching teams.
- **Impact:** Disseminate findings and best practices through UA white papers, presentations and national conferences.

Disciplines, Teams & Students Included in this Project

Thank you Teaching Team Members!

ENVS
Environmental Science & Sustainability

456 students | **32** team members

MCB
Molecular & Cellular Biology

433 students | **23** team members

PSY
Psychology

180 students | **8** team members

PSIO
Physiology

1,368 students | **39** team members

ANTH
Anthropology

106 students | **8** team members

CHEM
Chemistry

702 students | **18** team members

Our data: 11 teaching teams that served over 3,000 undergraduates in **environmental science**, **molecular and cellular biology**, **psychology**, **physiology**, **anthropology** and **chemistry** courses.

Reimagining teaching teams as communities of practice—a cross-disciplinary perspective

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What is a teaching team?

A teaching team (TT) consists of the people who directly support teaching and learning in a course.

Most commonly:

- Lead Instructor(s), typically faculty
- Teaching Assistants – Graduate or Undergraduate
- Undergraduate Learning Assistants, a.k.a., Preceptors
- Undergraduate Supplemental Instruction Leaders (SILs) (ThinkTank)

Featured Panelists

Sarah Grace

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Question

Who is included in your teaching team and how are these members chosen?

Reimagining teaching teams as communities of practice—a cross-disciplinary perspective

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Selected Background

- **Teaching Teams** can support higher sense of belonging, satisfaction with a course, learning, and course performance (e.g., Otero *et al.*, 2010; Talbot *et al.*, 2015; White *et al.*, 2016; Sellami *et al.*, 2017; Schick *et al.*, 2018; Clements *et al.*, 2022).

- **Learning Assistants** may experience positive impacts such as improved metacognitive awareness, motivation, self-efficacy, pedagogical development, or epistemological development (e.g., Top *et al.*, 2018; Lutz & Ríos, 2022; Breland *et al.*, 2023).

- **Communities of practice (CoPs)** frameworks have been used in different contexts to describe how groups of people interact, collaborate, and learn together to further a common goal (e.g., Lave and Wenger, 1991; Lave, 1991; Wenger, 2011; Townley, 2020).

Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

"Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly."

- Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015

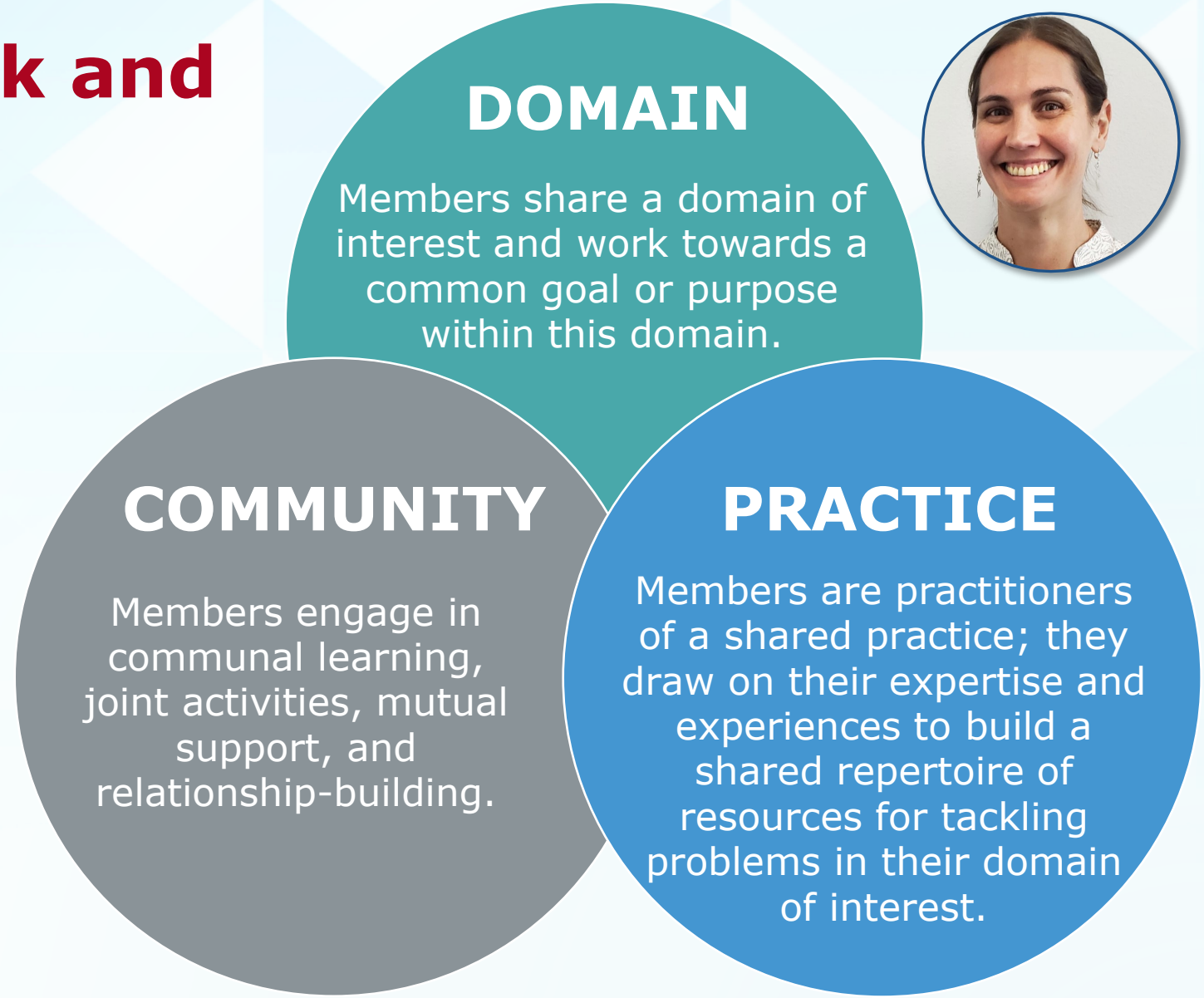

Figure adapted from https://cass.ab.ca/communities-of-practice-for-system-education-leaders/

Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

- **RQ1:** Which features of CoP elements (domain, community and practice) are present in teaching teams across disciplines?
- **RQ2:** What supports the development and sustainability of CoP elements?

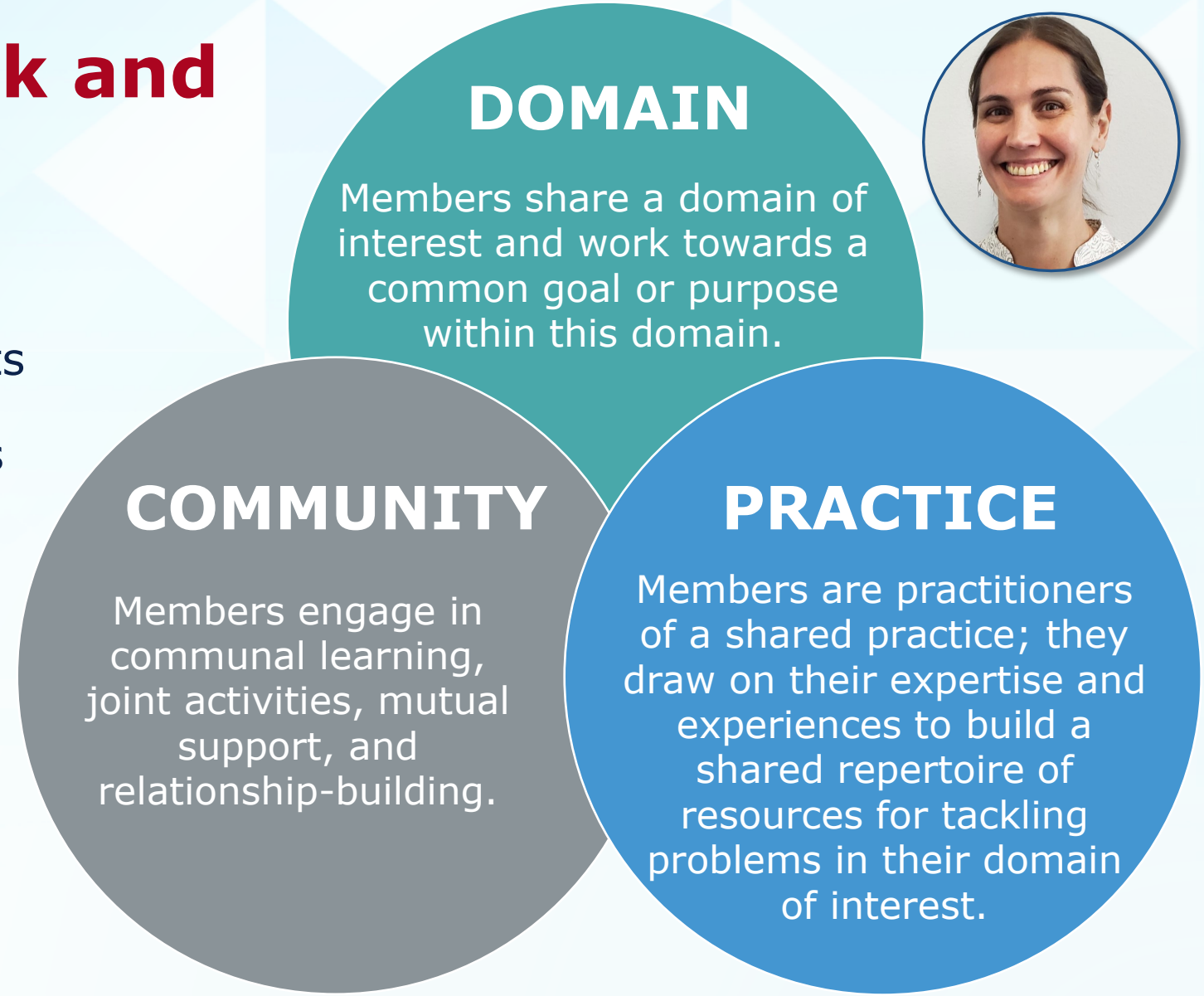

Figure adapted from https://cass.ab.ca/communities-of-practice-for-system-education-leaders/

Study Approach

Data collection (RQ1 and RQ2):

- Audio recorded semi-structured focus groups with individual teams (N=11 teams) in Fall 2024 and Spring 2025
- Focus group recordings transcribed and de-identified

Data Analysis:

RQ1: *Which features of CoP elements (domain, community and practice) are present in teaching teams across disciplines?*

- Transcripts coded for features of CoP elements

RQ2: *What supports the development and sustainability of CoP elements?*

- Open-ended memos and discussion to identify emergent themes

Code Book

Code Category	Code
Community	Communal Learning
	Mutual Support – Material
	Mutual Support - Emotional
	Building Relationships
Domain	Disciplinary Domain
	Pedagogical Activities
	Pedagogical Reflection
	Common Purpose
Practice	Expertise
	Shared Resources
	Team Norms
	Shared Experiences

Code Book

Code Category	Code
Community	Communal Learning
	Mutual Support – Material
	Mutual Support - Emotional
	Building Relationships

Mutual Support – Material code description:

Describes being able to rely on other members of the team in a material way or providing material support to others on the team. Requires an explicit statement of mutual support among team members, e.g., "collaboration" is not explicit enough.

Code Book

Code Category	Code
Domain	Disciplinary Domain
	Pedagogical Activities
	Pedagogical Reflection
	Common Purpose

Pedagogical Activities code description:

Describes engaging in pedagogical activities, e.g., teaching tasks or course improvements.

Code Book

Code Category	Code
Domain	Disciplinary Domain
	Pedagogical Activities
	Pedagogical Reflection
	Common Purpose

Pedagogical Reflection code description:

Describes engagement in reflection about teaching and learning.

Code Book

Code Category	Code
Practice	Expertise
	Shared Resources
	Team Norms
	Shared Experiences

Team Norms code description:

Describes the development, adoption, or use of team norms that support the team's practice. This could be scaffolded (i.e., by the instructor) or emergent. A norm is an activity, attitude, expectation, etc., that the team generally accepts and engages in regularly.

Coding Analysis

RQ1: Which features of CoP elements (domain, community and practice) are present in teaching teams across disciplines?

	Community				Domain				Practice			
	Communal Learning	Mutual Support (material)	Mutual Support (emotional)	Building Relationships	Disciplinary Domain	Pedagogical Activities	Pedagogical Reflection	Common Purpose	Expertise	Shared Resources	Team Norms	Shared Experiences
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Coding Analysis

Could you please share with me what it is like to be part of your teaching team?

	Community				Domain				Practice			
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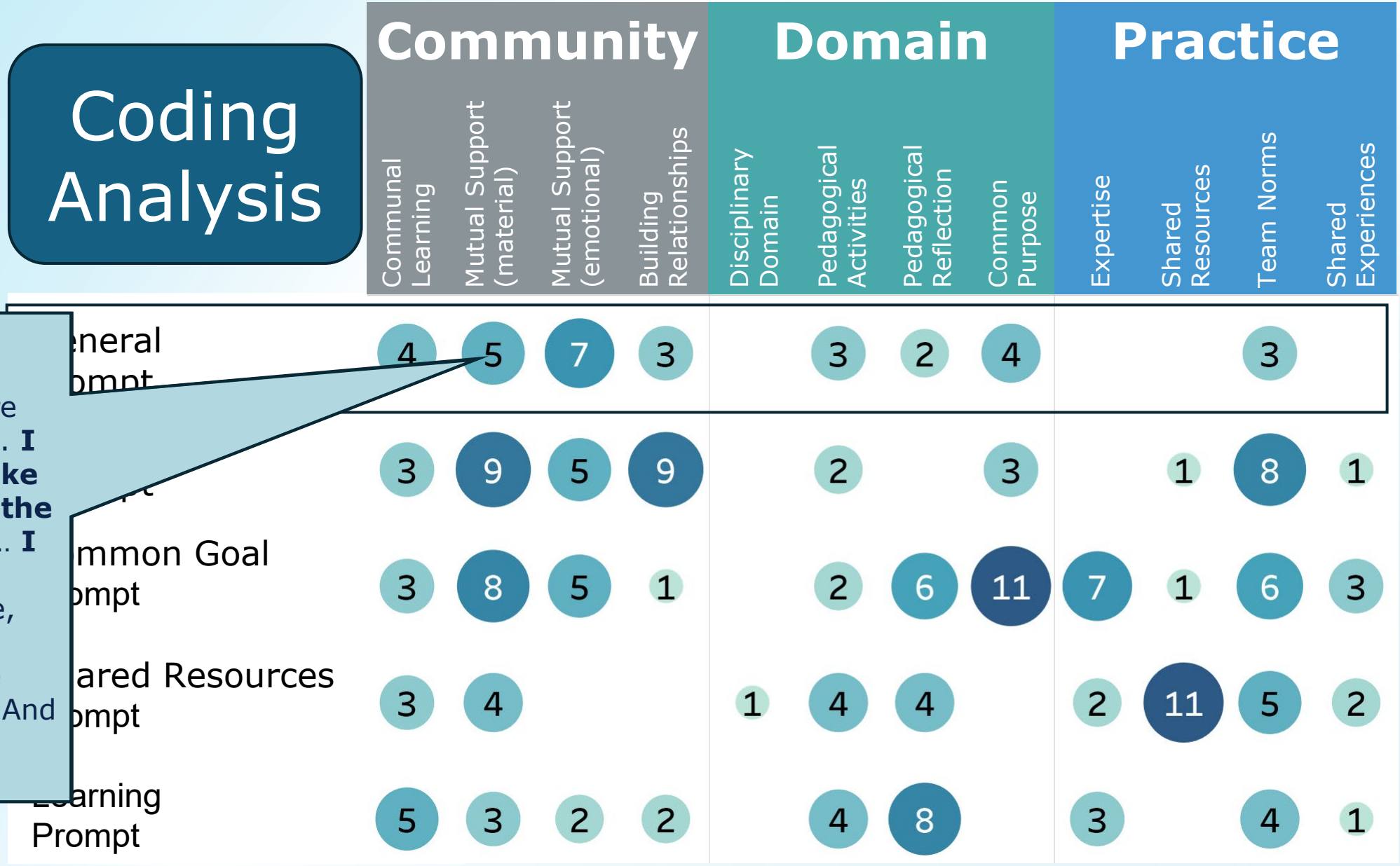
Could you please share with me what it is like to be part of your teaching team?

Coding Analysis

"I don't want to sound cringe, but I feel like we're like low-key a little family. **I feel like I can always like depend on [the rest of the team]**. Like, if I'm stuck… **I feel like I can always count on them** to be like, hey, can you just double check me before I tell the student this information? And I don't feel stressed out."



Coding Analysis

Could you talk to me about ways that your teaching team is or is not a community and things that you think affect the sense of community among your teaching team?

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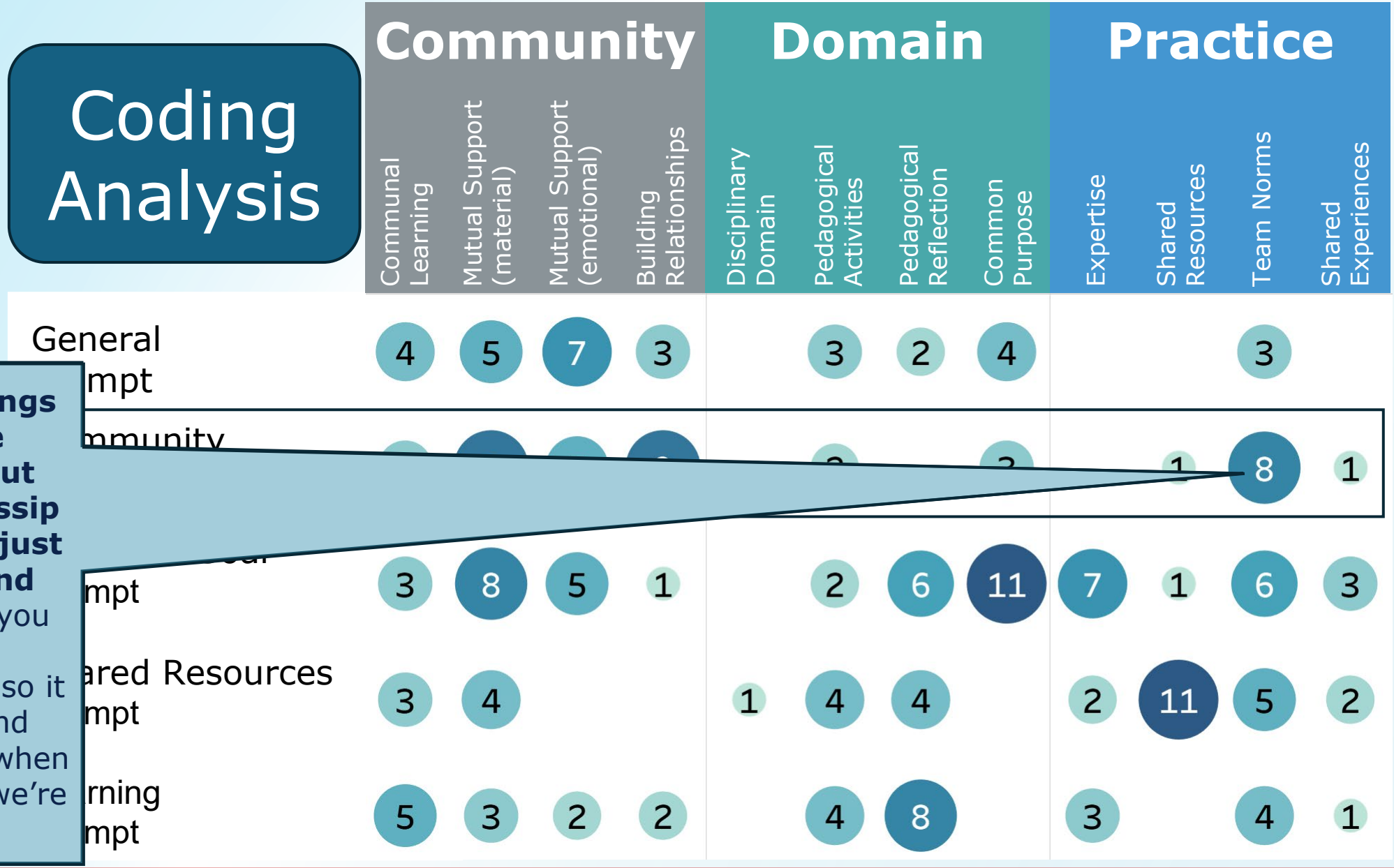
Coding Analysis

"…**the [weekly] meetings start off not with [the class subject] stuff, but it's like a check-in gossip session where we all just talk about our lives and what's going on**. And you can tell that everyone's invested and listening… so it makes it seem lighter and easier to communicate when we get into the reason we're there…"



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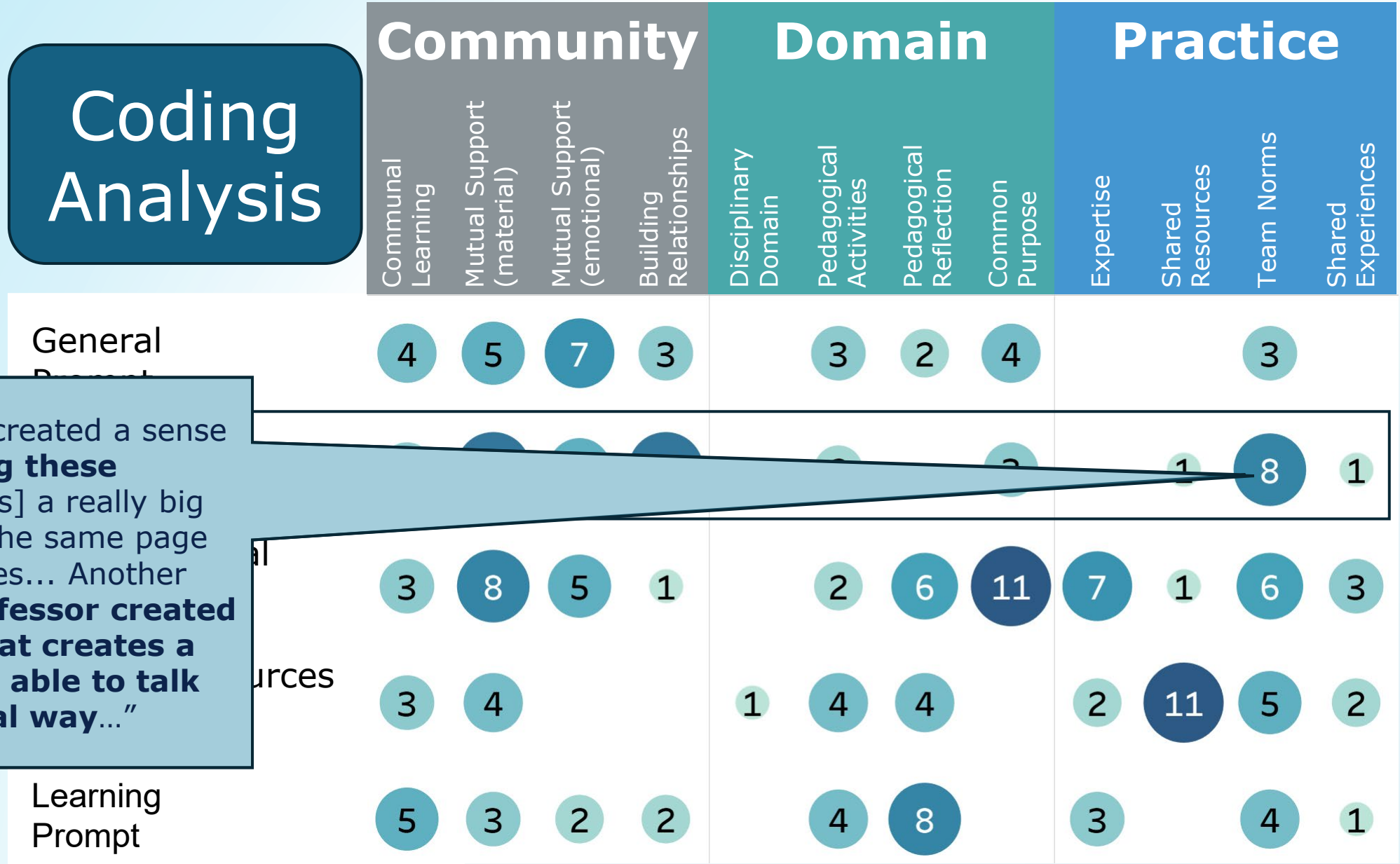

"I feel like we've really created a sense of community by **having these weekly meetings**… [it's] a really big way for us to all be on the same page and [to] talk about issues... Another way is, I think, **our professor created a GroupMe. And so that creates a really good way to be able to talk almost in a less formal way**…"

Coding Analysis

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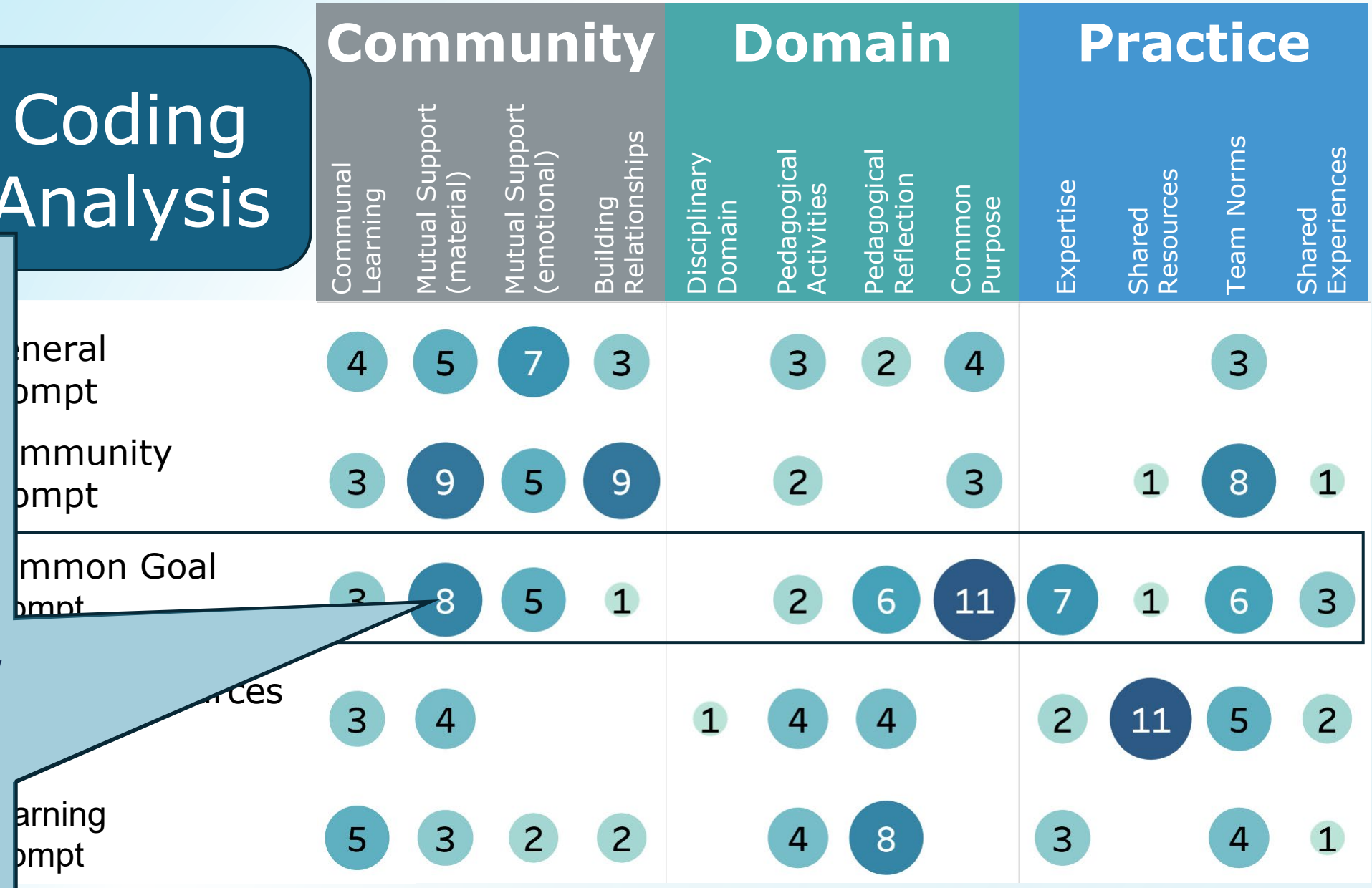
Does your teaching team have a common purpose or goal? If so, what is it?

<u>Follow-up:</u> What do you think allows your team to work together to accomplish the team's goals?

What do you think allows your team to work together to accomplish the team's goals?

Coding Analysis

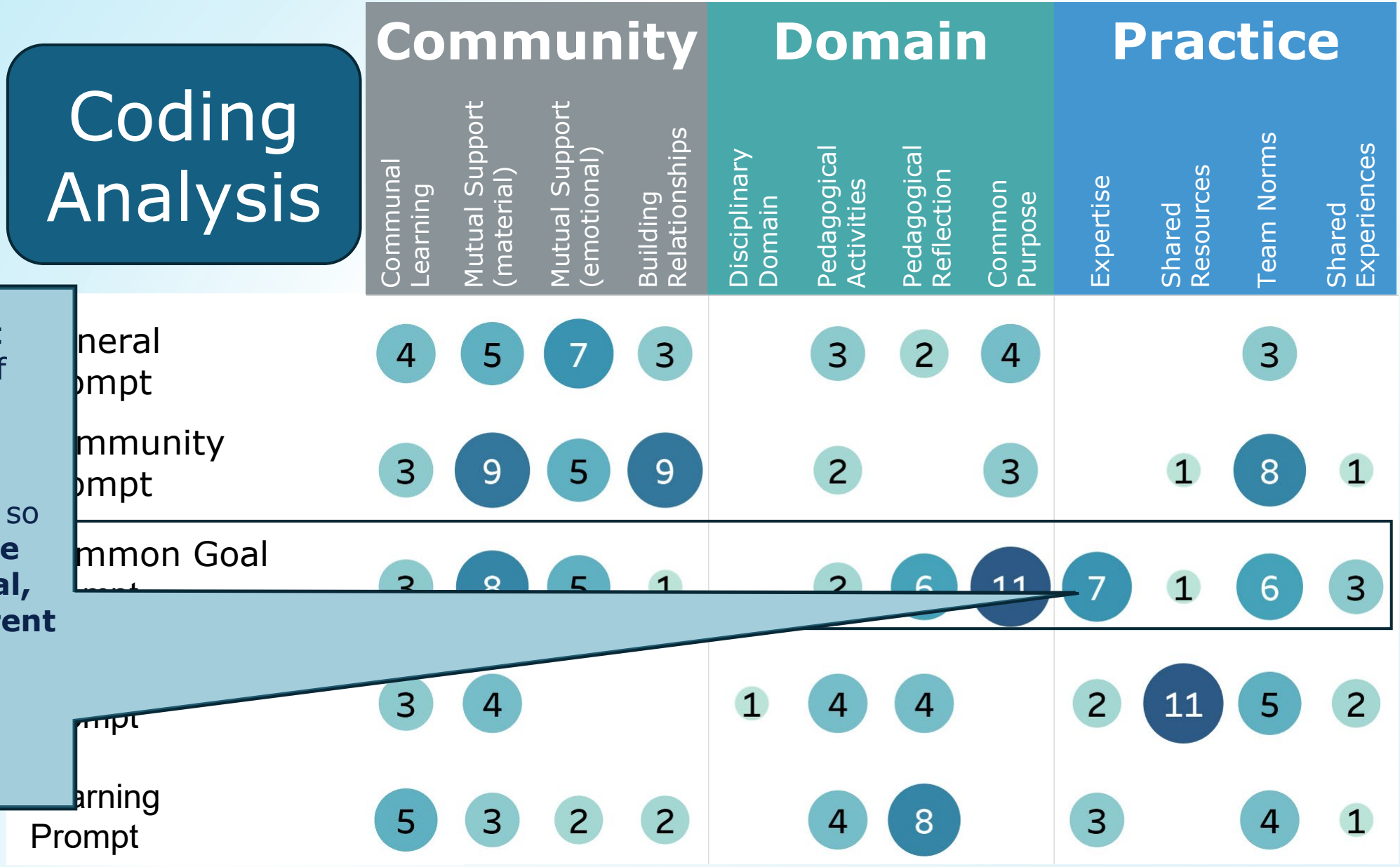
"…knowing that we're gonna make mistakes in the beginning, because at first it's very daunting to take a group of students on and then not knowing what we're gonna do, how should we talk to them, like all the aspects. And knowing that **we're gonna make mistakes together and be able to collaborate on how we can fix those issues**, I think really helped us connect to then pursue that success throughout the semester."



What do you think allows your team to work together to accomplish the team's goals?

Coding Analysis

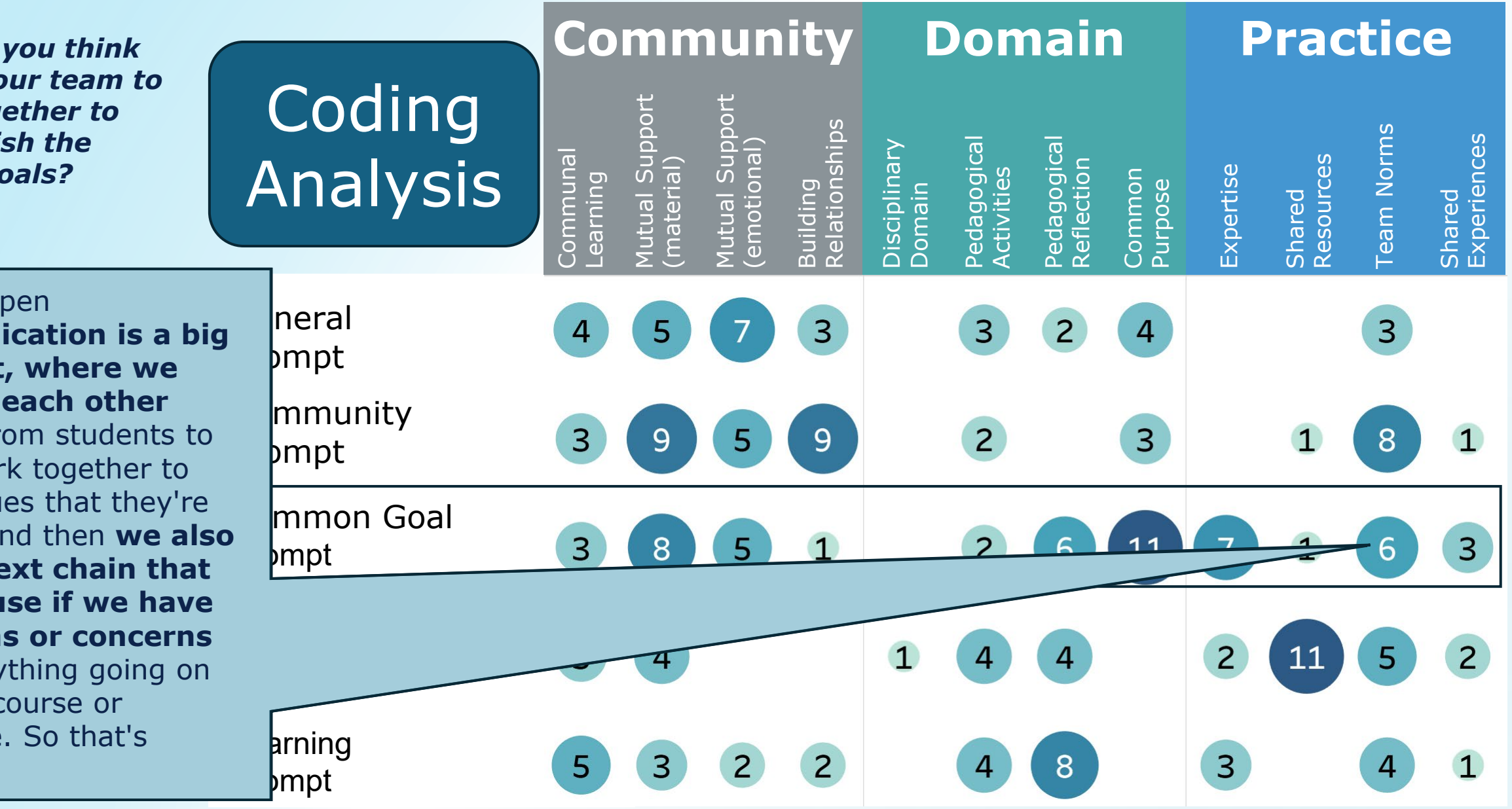
"We **all have different skills sets**. Like, one of my skill sets is working with people who might struggle with what the instructions are saying, so I can break it down… **we all have the same goal, but we all have different skill sets**, so it helps support each other in a way that I can't really describe."



What do you think allows your team to work together to accomplish the team's goals?

Coding Analysis

"I think open **communication is a big part of it, where we forward each other emails** from students to try to work together to solve issues that they're having, and then **we also have a text chain that we can use if we have questions or concerns** about anything going on with the course or otherwise. So that's helpful."



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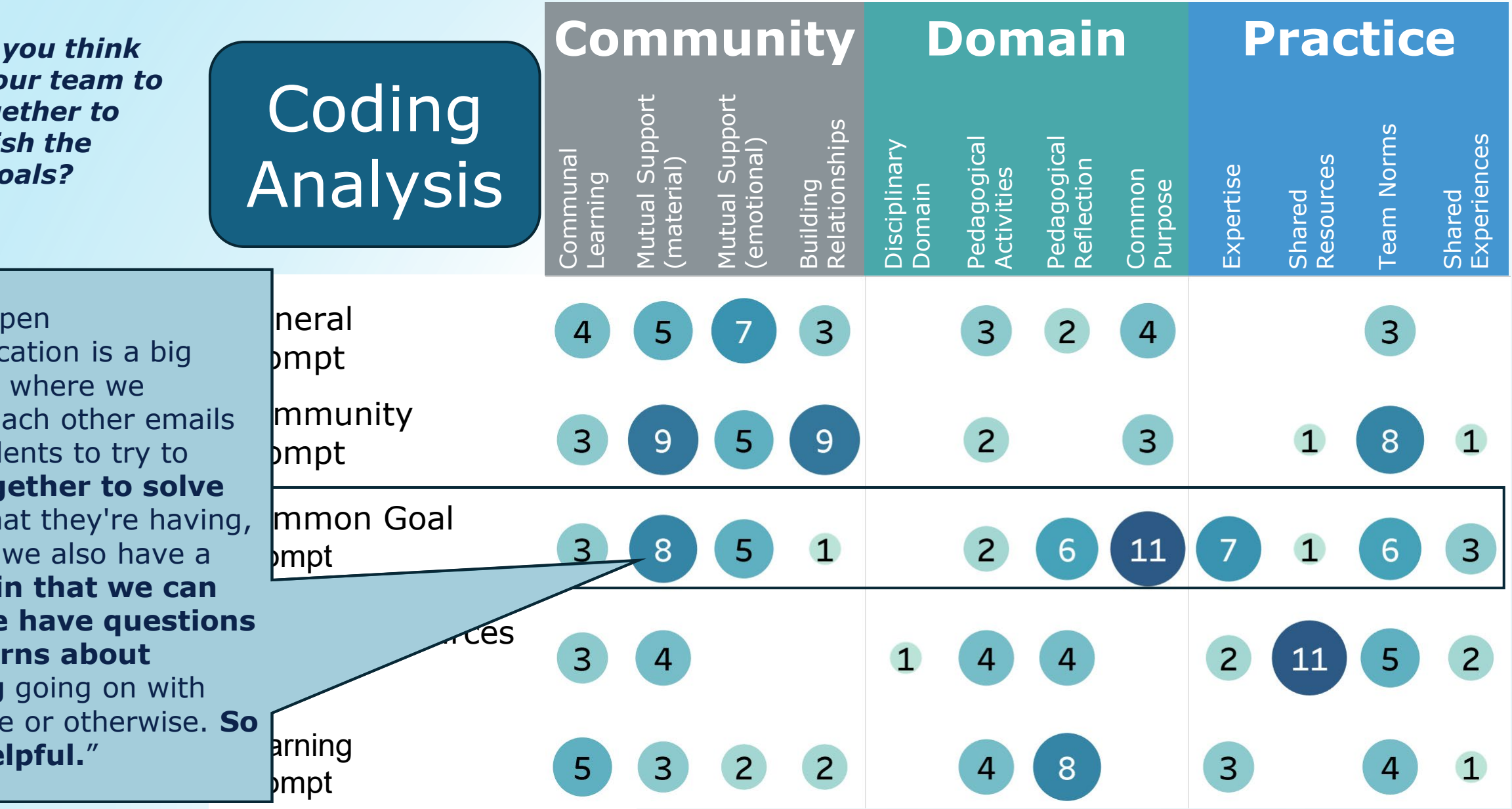

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What resources or strategies does your team have for accomplishing team goals?

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Coding Analysis

What resources or strategies does your team have for accomplishing team goals?

"We have, like a preceptor, shared **Google Drive**. And in there are **resources for things like grading and like ways to provide feedback** to the students like kind of **templates**"

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How do members of the teaching team learn to be effective preceptors, LAs, or TAs?

Coding Analysis

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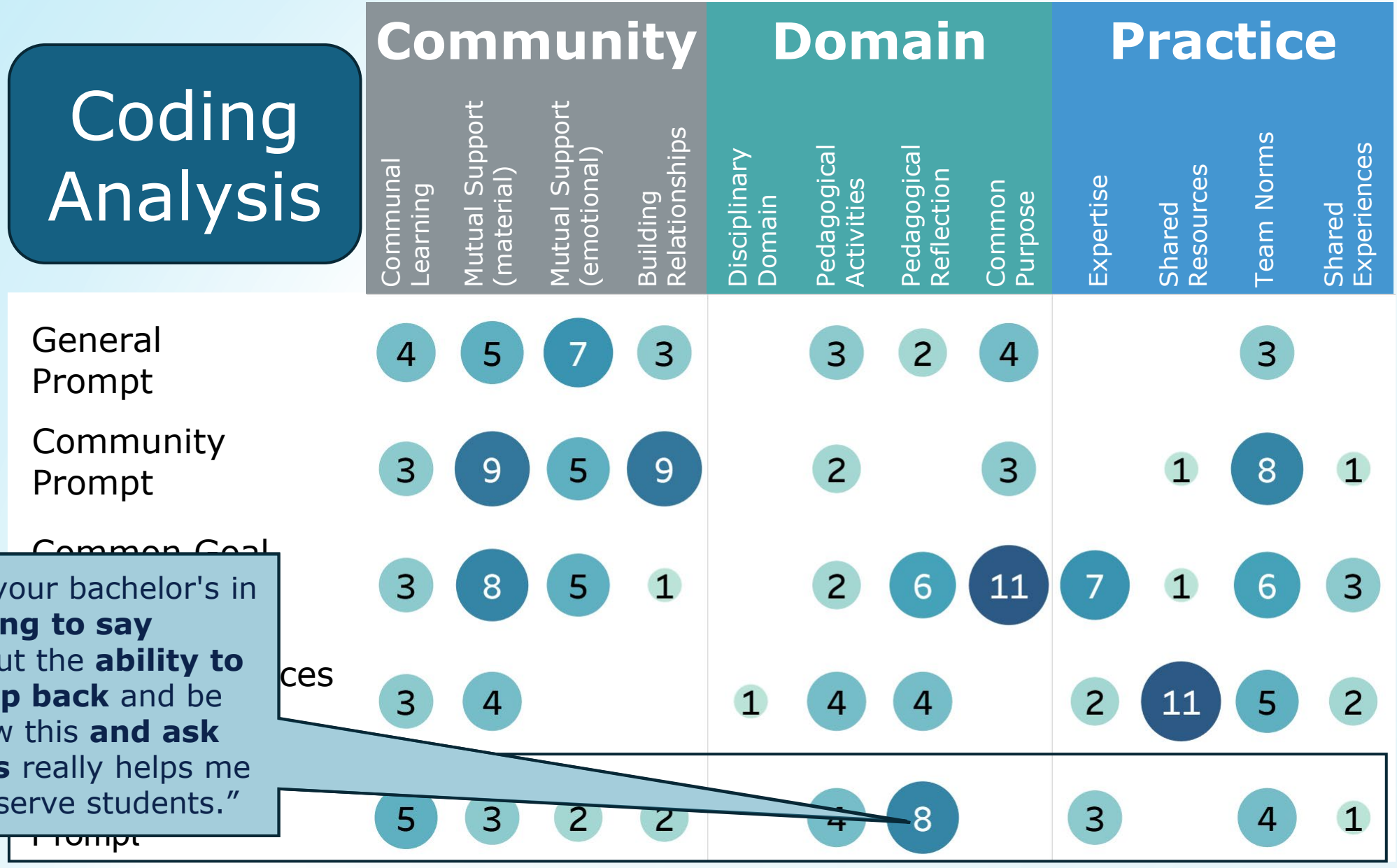

"You don't have even your bachelor's in chemistry. **You're going to say something wrong.** But the **ability to** kind of like **take a step back** and be like, I don't really know this **and ask like other preceptors** really helps me like learn how to best serve students."

Focus Group Data - Key Takeaways

RQ2: What supports the development and sustainability of CoP elements?

- **Shared Common Purpose** - *Can be explicit or emergent*
- **Communication & Team Norms** – *Culture and support around how teams communicate and collaborate*
- **Teaching Team Sense of Ownership** - *Individual projects, long-term projects, and course contributions are invaluable*
- **Community is Integral** – community was essential for emergence of domain and practice elements

Q&A

Guadalupe (Guada) Lozano
Director and Endowed Chair, CUES
Director, External Relations, School of Mathematical Sciences
Research Professor of Mathematics

Reimagining teaching teams as communities of practice—a cross-disciplinary perspective

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Our Fall 2025 "Enhancing your Teaching Team" FLC Schedule

Hybrid (in-person or Zoom) Meeting Schedule:

- **Session 1 :** Welcome + Introductions + FLC Nuts and Bolts
- **Session 2 :** What We've Learned Part 1 - Our Findings + Barriers and Challenges
- **Session 3 :** What We've Learned Part 2 - Opportunities + High Impact Practices
- **Session 4 :** Additional Resources, Tips and Techniques
- **Session 5 :** Share Out Session 1 of 2 - Participants presented what they are doing/plan to do with their instructional support/teaching teams
- **Session 6 :** Share Out Session 2 of 2 - Participants presented what they are doing/plan to do with their instructional support/teaching teams

Vignettes - 3 Teaching Teams

Foundational Chemistry

LARGE ENROLLMENT & ACTIVE LEARNING

A description of a teaching team that supports a large-enrollment foundational chemistry lecture course geared towards pre-health students....

EXPLORE VIGNETTE ›

In-Person Laboratory Sciences

HANDS-ON DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC INSTRUCTION

This vignette describes an in-person laboratory sciences course where students engage with specimens and dissections. Insights were gleaned...

EXPLORE VIGNETTE ›

Online Environmental Sciences

LARGE ONLINE COURSE (OES)

An online environmental sciences course offered across two 7-week terms. It emphasizes research methods and general education...

EXPLORE VIGNETTE ›

Featured Panelists

Sarah Grace
Assistant Professor of Practice, Psychology
College of Science
Fall 2025 FLC Facilitator

Maggie Keef
Associate Professor of Practice, Fashion Industry's Science & Technology
College of Agriculture, Life & Environmental Sciences
Fall 2025 FLC Participant

Laura Van Dorn
Associate Professor of Practice, Chemistry & Biochemistry
College of Science
Fall 2025 FLC Facilitator

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Vignettes - 3 Teaching Teams

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EXPLORE VIGNETTE ›

1. Log in to your **Google** account

2. Scan QR code for link

Reimagining teaching teams as communities of practice—a cross-disciplinary perspective

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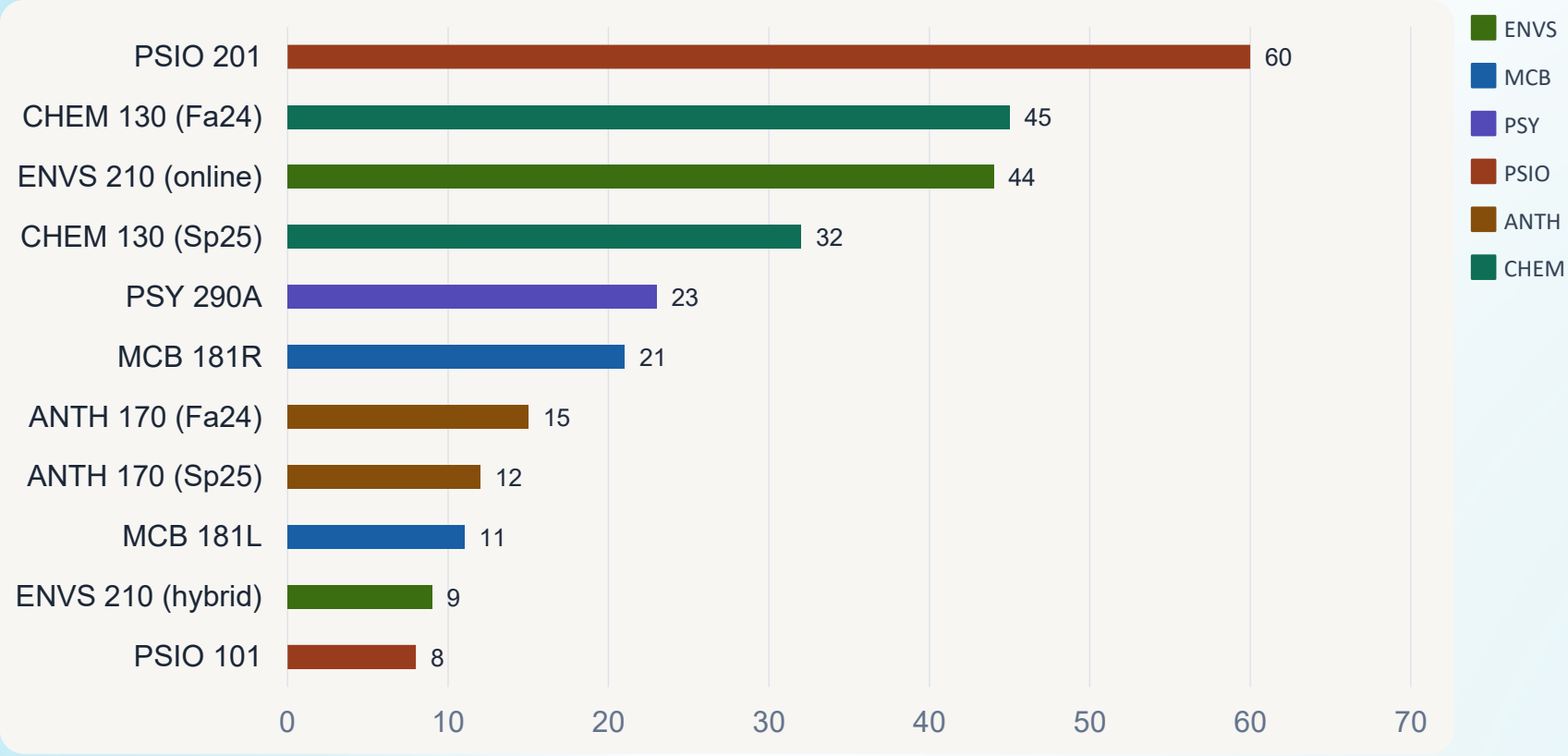
Teaching Teams included in this project

Students per Team Member



Thank you Teaching Team Members!

Our data: 11 teaching teams that served over 3,000 undergraduates in environmental science, molecular and cellular biology, psychology, physiology, anthropology and chemistry courses.

Reimagining teaching teams as communities of practice—a cross-disciplinary perspective

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