Designing and Facilitating Collaborative Learning for Communities of Practice

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Objectives

• Communities of practice
• Tools to build and strengthen communities of practice
• Measuring collaborative learning using social network analysis (SNA)
• An example

Introduction

• Learning is a social process taking place within the context of our daily actions and experiences

• Collaborative learning is active participation of students in the learning process instead of being passive absorbers

• Bringing individuals together and forming communities of practice is an important tenet of learning
Communities of Practice

• Communities of practice are formed by people of
  – similar concerns or interests,
  – with the aim of addressing these concerns:
    • solving problems,
    • improving their performance (with regular interaction)

• Social networking and online teaching platforms can provide additional venues for teaching and learning
Key Questions to Answer

• How does relationship-building impact student learning in communities of practice?

• How do different types of assignments and class activities impact collaborative learning?

• How can we develop more effective learning assignments?
Learning in Communities of Practice

- Learning is social...
- Facilitation
- Participants learn when
  - Involve in community (belonging)
  - Do certain activities (doing)
  - Establish identity (being)
  - Interpret the world around (experience)

Components of a Social Theory Of Learning (Wenger, 2005, p. 5)
Collaboration for Communities of Practice

• Collaboration is related with belongingness
• Three Pillars of belongingness
  – *Engagement*: getting together with people and share experience and knowledge
  – *Imagination*: attachment to broader images that people make up in their minds
  – *Alignment*: mutual alignment towards common goals as well as the separate processes of collaborating with partners
Collaborative Learning

- Collaborative learning refers to an instruction method in which learners at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal
  - Active class contribution
  - Work with other students on projects
  - Work with classmates outside of class
  - Participate in a community-based projects
  - Discuss ideas from readings with others
  - Ability to learn from peers
  - Involvement and experience
Collaborative Learning

• Collaborative learning supports modern paradigms on learning:
  – Deeper level learning (Biggs 1987)
  – Shared understanding/knowledge (Mulder, Swaak, & Kessels 2002)
  – Critical thinking (Bullen 1998)

• Combined with an authentic context:
  – Social construction of knowledge (Jonassen 1992, 1994)
  – Competence-based learning (Keen 1992)
Instructor’s Goals & Teaching Philosophy

- *Three pillars*: collaboration, mutual respect, and engagement
- In order for the common goal, collaborative learning, to be reached, collaboration (trust) needs to be developed
- *Participative lectures*: most of my classes have some level of award for participation, as I believe the best way of learning
Collaborative Learning Activities

- How to manage your network article
- Ice-breaking activities
- Guest lecturers
- Site visits
- Online activities and Webcourses
- Review questions / Group discussions
- Games & simulations
- Case studies
- Research-based service-learning projects
Friendship network (before)
Friendship network (after)
Advice Network (before)
Advice Network (after)
Descriptive Results

- Network/relationship building emphasized in class is critical in real life
- Practitioner guest speakers were great
- Activities in the class were helpful in developing networks / relationships
- Field visits (e.g., EOC visit) were very helpful
- Team activities were helpful in to my learning in the course
- Service-learning term projects were helpful to my learning
- Diverse experiences of my classmates were helpful to my learning
Conclusion

Communities of Practice through CBR/SL:

- Build trust via long lasting relationship with the community: **social capital**
- Serve the community by helping to address its needs: **capacity building**
- Educate students/researchers and teach them how to become better citizens: **engagement**
- Build **communities of practices** around pressing social problems
Conclusion

• Students learn more from interacting with other students and practitioners
• Students increase their learning and as a result of collaborative learning activities
• If we allow student led instruction, then we have to ensure that students work effectively together and do not remain in silos that are created by them or environment
• Collaborative learning activities help build competency (engagement)
Thank you ...