

Professional development of educators through a discipline-based community of practice (CoP)

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Title: Professional development of educators through a discipline-based community of practice (CoP)

Keywords: collaborative learning; social learning; innovative pedagogy; higher education; Community of practice; Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Purpose

Applying a theoretical framework proposed by Mercieca (2016) and the six critical elements of a successful CoP identified by Trust and Horrocks (2019) to measure to what extent a community of practice (CoP) facilitates professional development of educators teaching public relations and advertising in higher educational institutes.

Key problem

Teaching advertising and public relations in the digital era has become volatile as the marketing and communication context is changing rapidly. No one can catch up in the latest development of teaching pedagogy. Educators need to engage in social and collaborative learning of practices for professional development.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis: Participating in a disciplined-based CoP enables members to engage in social and collaborative learning about new teaching pedagogies. The CoP can be successful if the community's purpose aligns with members' learning needs and goals.

Methodology

A community of practice (CoP) was established among 13 advertising and public relations educators. The community met seven Saturdays during the period February to October 2020. CoP members wrote reflection papers after the meetings. Altogether a repertoire of 39 entries with 8,765 words were collected. A qualitative textual analysis was conducted.

Findings

From a review of all the reflective reports, preliminary findings provided face validity of the hypothesis one. Members commented that they were exposed to new pedagogies such as blended learning and participatory learning. Members reported that assignments and projects shared by other members were inspirational. Here are three representative quotes:

“The theme of the fourth CoP meeting was blended learning. I only have a rough idea about how blended learning works, but don’t know how effective and popular it is among student participants. It’s good to learn from committee members about blended learning practice case by case” (Lecture)

“One most inspiring sharing was that a colleague presented a student project in which students were required to work on a life history for another student. The project did not only help students acquire qualitative research skills, but also did it serve as a means to let students have an in-depth understanding about another student whom they have been acquainted for nearly 4 years”.

“It’s good to see that multimedia project assignment such as podcast format is proposed and used by some committee members. I’m inspired by this, and would also consider to give my students more opportunities and flexibility to present their project ideas in a more diverse and innovative way” (Senior lecturer)

Implications

Results from this study can inform the academia on the capacity of a discipline-based community of practice in enriching the members in professional development.

References

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