

Knowledge Construction in Networked Learning Communities in One Portal All Learners (OPAL)

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

- The first local study on how networked learning in One Portal All Learners (OPAL) collaboration groups can support knowledge construction within Networked Learning Communities (NLCs).
- The development of a guide on networked learning to enhance online interactions and sustain knowledge construction aimed at improving teaching, curriculum implementation and student outcomes.

BACKGROUND

A Professional Development Review conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2009 found the need to develop a network of Singapore teachers to foster collaborative professionalism through critical inquiry and networked learning. OPAL, a learning and content management system for all MOE staff launched in 2012, supports the culture of continual learning and improvement of teaching practice in NLCs. NLCs can set up online collaboration groups in OPAL (hereafter referred to as 'ONLCs') to connect across clusters, zones and divisions to collaborate and construct knowledge together.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The study investigated how NLC members engaged in knowledge construction within their

ONLCs, the roles they adopted and the factors that influenced their participation in knowledge construction, so that an implementation framework be developed to guide knowledge construction in ONLCs.

KEY FINDINGS

- The study revealed that the majority of the online knowledge construction was at the level of sharing and comparing of information. The owners/leaders of ONLCs adopted the roles of facilitator, thought leader, and active participant during online interactions.
- Based on the factors found, the following measures are recommended for active co-facilitation and construction of knowledge:
 1. Adopting a structured approach to guide NLCs' goal-setting, formation of timeline and course of actions;
 2. Seeking organisational support;
 3. Nurturing a conducive environment that builds trust among members;
 4. Engendering shared ownership among members;
 5. Nurturing a culture of sharing that prioritises the construction of knowledge; and
 6. Tapping OPAL as an enabler in terms of its affordances.

- The implementation framework developed elaborated on the following steps:
 1. Getting started: identifying areas of concern and purposes of setting up an ONLC
 2. Forming the group: inviting other peers/ collaborators and identifying knowledgeable others
 3. Identifying group goals: discussing areas of interest, performing literature scans
 4. Planning the course of action: sharing the timeline and milestones in the group calendar
 5. Implementing the plan: carrying out the course of action, collecting data and maintaining communication
 6. Reviewing the outcomes: sharing observations on achievements and areas for improvement, and discussing and agreeing on next steps using the forum and webinar tools
 7. Reflecting, affirming and celebrating: sharing reflections and learning points using the blog tool, celebrating the learning, and deciding on how to share the learning with the community beyond the NLC

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for practice

- The factors that influence NLC members' participation in knowledge construction in ONLCs suggest ways of nurturing a conducive environment and a culture of sharing that help members co-own and co-lead the professional learning in NLCs.
- NLCs may apply the key findings and considerations, which have been summarised and

included in the "Guide to Effective Professional Development: Volume 3 — Networked Learning Communities" (MOE, 2017) made available to all MOE staff through OPAL, to enhance knowledge construction in online or asynchronous collaboration spaces.

Proposed follow-up activities

Future research can explore NLCs' use of other types of online collaboration spaces and how the online interactions feed into face-to-face interactions to sustain ongoing knowledge construction among members.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 69 representatives from 53 schools and three MOE HQ divisions were involved in the study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research methodology was qualitative in nature with procedures and techniques in line with Charmaz's (2000) constructivist grounded theory. The two main types of data collected were interaction data from the participants' OPAL collaboration groups, and data collected during FGDs with the participants.

REFERENCE

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