

Resource Document: BUILDING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TO DISCUSS TEACHING STRATEGIES

What is a community of practice (CoP)?

A CoP is defined as a group of people who come together to share common interests and goals, aimed at improving their skills by working alongside more experienced members and being involved in increasingly complicated tasks (Lave and Wenger, 1991). It is a special type of informal network, democratic in nature, that emerges from a desire to work more effectively, having dialogues and to understand work more deeply among members of a domain.

What are the characteristics of CoPs?

It has been mainly three characteristics: Domain, Community and Practice. Domain consist of knowledge and defines a set of agenda/issues, Community refer to its members and Practice promote to developing knowledge through shared experiences, technology and informal networks.

What is the difference between CoP, team and network?

CoP is different in the sense that this informal community tailor the knowledge and experiences of its members, learn from each other and practice to make their organization working more effective, whereas in teams, people take care of projects supervised by a leader and in networks, the focus is on relationships.

Who can be the members of CoP?

Membership in all CoPs is voluntary. The majority of members belong to same community and focus on professional development. CoPs formation is free from rigid hierarchy, it is more horizontal and provide full opportunity to its members to participate and innovate. The overall effect is enabling members to learn, apply, and adapt knowledge from everyone.

How CoPs help in higher education?

Communities of practice recognise the diverse needs of the increasing numbers of learners entering university with different academic and cultural backgrounds and with varying social expectations and experiences. So CoP enable staff to learn, apply, and adapt knowledge and bring motivation among the community keeping in mind the need of hour. The Emphasis of CoPs is on process rather than on product, they improve the overall culture of learning in higher education.

What are the critical building blocks of a CoP?

Every CoP is unique and motivate its members for sharing, giving feedback and reflections. CoPs proceeding include facilitators, active members, management support, resources, focused area for discussion, problem solving approach, technology support, knowledge share and dissemination trust.

How are CoP evaluated?

Members of CoP share a concern or a passion for something they do, why they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. But there is no specific guidance to evaluate the CoP rather it is a practice to support learner's knowledge and learning experiences. Although, members evaluate their own practice by doing reflection.

Why there is a hesitation for staff to be a part of CoP?

Because academician have experienced success in developing their instructional methodology in many fields and they lack a powerful connection to CoP opportunities for supervision or evaluation of CoP that could contribute to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Why knowledge Creation and Sharing is easy in CoP?

CoP is a good platform where members are free from hierarchal and authoritative issues. They can freely share, create and innovate new ideas and ways for any issues that is under discussion.

What can be an agenda for discussion in CoP?

CoPs can have any agenda under discussion which is aligned to need of students, staff, administration and university mission.

Why content delivery in class is an important agenda to discuss in CoP?

This is important because this is the first reason why or how most of the faculty start interaction with students when they go to lecture for delivering the content of a particular course. This face to face interaction with students has to be utilized fully to foster the active learning environment.

How the student's engagement on content can be ensured?

To ensure the students engagement on learning, the instructor must think about student's emotional, behavioural and Cognitive engagement. The content engagement is expected to increase by supportive environment, collaborative learning and using active learning techniques.

What are the active learning strategies?

Active Learning Strategies are the activities that are carried out by faculty to engage the students for their learning such as Dialogue, Flipped Class Room, Think -Pair-Share, Choral Response, Instructor Storytelling, Discussions, Classroom Opinion Polls (Hand pick) / Student Polling (clickers), Peer Review Writing Task, One-Minute Papers, Muddiest Point and Videos etc.

What are challenges of using active learning in class?

The biggest challenge is faculty's perception that active learning techniques cannot be done in large classes, these techniques might be useful in small classes. Also, one requires the support of head of departments/schools to try/experiment these techniques. The fear of failure is too high that people do not want to experiment.

Is there any teaching model that help to reflect on teaching style?

There are many models in literature to reflect on teaching, in particular Grasha's model (1994) is very interesting to reflect. It gives an opportunity to a faculty for reflecting on their role as expert, formal authority, personal model, facilitator or delegator.

References:

- Lave, J., and Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Brame, C., (2016). Active learning. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching (<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/active-learning/>.)
- Grasha, A. F., (1994). A Matter of Style: The Teacher as Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator, and Delegator, College Teaching, Vol. 42, No. 4, pp. 142-149

Note: This document is not a statement of formal university policy, but rather a teaching and learning resource produced by the Thapar University Teaching Fellows in collaboration with CAPSL, TCD, 2018. For further information, contact Dr Meenakshi Rana (mrana@thapar.edu)