



Collaborative learning among Australasian educators through Online Learning Community (OLC)

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This poster describes a collaboration initiative being built for educators in Australia and Asian countries using an Online Learning Community (OLC). The main purpose of the initiative was to enhance the professional learning and development of educators in Indonesia. A great number of teachers in Indonesia have been facing a lot of challenges to continually update their professional knowledge and skills due to the facts that they live in remote areas and have limited resources. On the other hand, they are required by society to provide the best education for their students, so the students can become competitive assets in this globalised environment. Starting from this problem, the authors have designed and developed a professional learning framework using Online Learning Community (OLC) that offers flexibility and continuous support for the teachers in Indonesia. The OLC provides a conducive and collaborative environment for the teachers to widen knowledge and exchange information not only with their colleagues, but also other practitioners from all over places in Indonesian archipelago as well as Australia and other Asian countries, like China and Japan.

Keywords: online learning community, teacher professional learning

Background

Hargraves said that teaching has been challenged to the edge of transformation (2000). There is an increasing expectation for the teachers in many parts of the world to ensure that their students meet high standards of performance in learning and be competitive assets in this globalised world. Therefore, there is a need that teachers keep themselves up-to-date with the challenges. Through collaboration, teachers would be able to respond more effectively to challenges as they can widen their perspectives, exchange ideas and experience and be inspired by other practitioners.

To support the above way of thinking and learning, Information Communication Technology (ICT) has shown its potential in facilitating collaborative learning. There are a wide variety of ICT tools that can be adapted to support collaborative learning, however, a learning framework needs to be built around the stakeholders' needs of collaborative learning.

Current teacher professional development mostly emphasizes a "directive" method (Scott and Scott, 2010) and prescriptive information dissemination with little emphasis on teachers' interaction and collaboration. Putnam and Borko (2006) explained that a change would not happen unless teachers have the opportunity to interact with other colleagues and experts in the professional community. The

professional community that can support the professional learning of teachers should consist of members with common goals and interests. They should have the opportunity to interact with each other to pursue their common goals. Lave and Wenger introduced this concept as a Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

In our learning community, where members consisting of teachers, teacher educators, researchers and other practitioners, are located in diverse locations in the world, the use of online technology has a crucial role. Therefore, the concept of Online Learning Community (OLC) or Online CoP, which is also called Online Learning Community for Teacher Professional Development (OLC4TPD) has been developed and trialed in this study to test its feasibility to support collaborative learning among the educators.

OLC4TPD

The teachers in various geographical locations in Indonesia were invited to participate in the OLC4TPD. Some of the people came from a physical learning community, while the others came from virtual networks, such as Facebook. The profiles of the people include in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, educational practitioners, school leaders, and government officers. In addition, we have a number of educational practitioners and researchers from Australia, China and Japan.

The community meets virtually through synchronous and asynchronous interaction to discuss various aspects of education, which cover curriculum design and development, the educational system in Indonesia and other countries, classroom management and educational technology. For the asynchronous interaction, the members are encouraged to participate in the scientific discussion raised either by the moderator, experts or other community members. Using Discussion Forum, Wiki and Document Repository, the members can choose any formats in which to express themselves. In addition, bi-weekly online meetings using Skype have been conducted to provide a room for the members to meet in real-time, to discuss various issues (social to scientific issues), to listen an online talk by the experts, and to develop and practice some teaching and learning skills.

More than 85% of the educators who participated in this OLC4TPD activities have not been in a structured OLC environment that aims to support their professional learning. They have also not been in any interaction with international experts of their fields, so the collaborative learning activities in this community have given a new perspective to these educators.

In this poster, the authors will present several case studies how the collaborative learning process among Australasian teachers has happened in this community. It will also present some of the impacts on the development of professional skills and knowledge among the community members. Last but not least, it will also present several socio-cultural and technological issues faced during the collaborative interaction and what strategies the authors have developed to tackle them.

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