

Another way for student exchanges

A Google+ Community for collaborative learning related to European Public Health issues

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Principle	Principle
1	Design for evolution
2	Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives
3	Encourage and accept different levels of participation
4	Develop both public and private community spaces
5	Focus on value
6	Combine familiarity and excitement
7	Create a rhythm for the community

i. Design Principles for Community of Practice

Background context

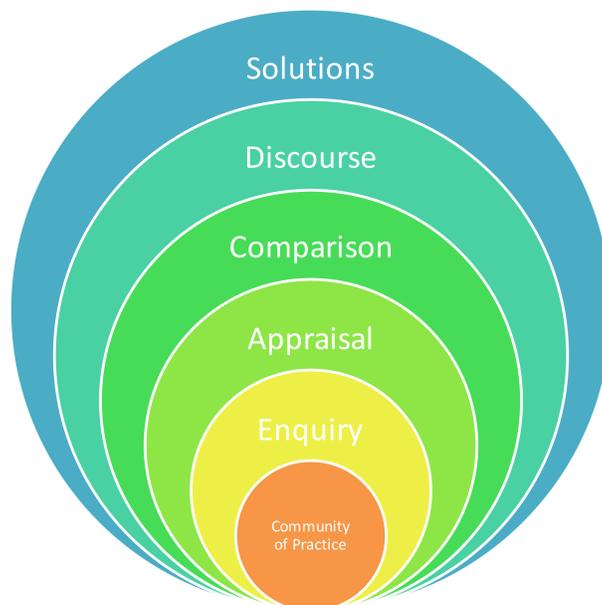
The University of Derby College of Health & Social Care and Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences School of Health Care undertook meetings during October 2015 as part of Erasmus+ staff mobility exchange scheme to explore opportunities for joint working across institutions.

One of the outcomes from these meetings was to pursue a project for online collaboration for cross institutional student learning. It was agreed that to facilitate the widening of the student learning experience and perspective that initially the project would be based around a shared community of practice focussed around the subject area of Public Health. This subject area was selected due to the synergies in nursing and other professional programmes, as health and social care continues to increasingly shift towards a preventative model across and beyond Europe (European Commission 2010, 2013).

In order to ensure that this online community of practice was both of educational value and of user shared interest it was recognised that the initial and continued development of the platform must be a progressive collaborative exercise between the lead academics together with integral student contribution.

Aims of the project

- To enable cost effective innovative collaborative and comparative student learning with the utilisation of a freely accessible online platform.
- To widen undergraduates healthcare students appreciation of the challenges and responses to Public Health issues across Europe.
- To stimulate online discourse and debate that leads to the creation of new or alternative approaches to tackling these issues.



ii. Principles of the Community of Practice – European Public Health Collaboration

What is a Community of Practice & why Google+ Communities

A community practice is defined by Wenger (2014): “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”. Cambridge, Kaplan and Suter (2005) highlighted some of the benefits of a community of practice as: connect people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact; provide a shared context for people to communicate and share in a way that builds understanding and insight; enable dialogue between people who come together to explore new possibilities, solve challenging problems, and create new, mutually beneficial opportunities; stimulate learning by serving as a vehicle for authentic communication, mentoring, coaching, and self-reflection; capture and diffuse existing knowledge to help people improve their practice by providing a forum to identify solutions to common problems and a process to collect and evaluate best practices; introduce collaborative processes to groups and organizations as well as between organizations to encourage the free flow of ideas and exchange of information; help people organize around purposeful actions that deliver tangible results; generate new knowledge to help people transform their practice to accommodate changes in needs and technologies.

Often communities of practice have no formal design rather they are self-organising systems. Yet research has identified actions that can help sustain and improve the effectiveness of communities of practice (Bates 2014). Communities of practice are dynamic social structures that require “cultivation” so that they can emerge and grow (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002).

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) identified seven key design principles (see table i) for creating effective and self-sustaining communities of practice, related specifically to the management of the community, although the ultimate success is determined by the activities of the members of the community themselves.

Multiple platforms were consulted upon across institutions, inclusive of academics and students, before it was determined that the platform of Google+ Community met

the shared collaborators criteria of: accessibility; user-friendly navigation; visually engaging; enabled sharing; opportunities for discourse and debate.

Moving forwards

The platform was initially intended as a private platform to be used across students enrolled on undergraduate health and social care programmes at Derby and Rotterdam, although the development team recognised the potential benefits of widening membership to other institutions and perhaps to anyone with an interest in Public Health.

The platform will initially will be piloted for twelve months between April 2016 – April 2017. The use of the platform will be integrated across institution undergraduate Public Health modules, although engagement and collaboration will not be exclusively constrained by confines of the academic calendar and modular timings.

In order to instil excitement and a rhythm of activity for all participating students across the pilot period a series of participant team challenges will be devised. Teams will be no greater than 10 member in each, membership will be either institution specific or across organisations. The first challenge will be in the development of a public health campaign film via YouTube of no longer duration than 120 seconds. The campaign film will address a contemporary European Public Health issue and must have a defined target population. An aspirational prize along with recognition will be on offer to the team producing the most impactful quality film as determined by the community of practice moderators inclusive of academics with a specialist interest in public health.



iii. Defined areas of the platform

References

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