Gilfus Education Group

Educational Research, Strategy, and Implementations

Promise of Community Changes Education Technology Paradigms

Community.
Context.
Content.

Gilfus Education Group
1050 Connecticut Avenue NW, 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

888.861.3375 Main

www.gilfuseducationgroup.com

For additional copies please contact: Gilfus Education Group
1050 Connecticut Ave, NW, 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

Main: 888.861.3375

For more information: www.gilfuseducationgroup.com

About the Gilfus Education Group

The Gilfus Education Group delivers education innovation by bringing refreshing clarity to academic and corporate enterprises through educational, technology, and business consulting. The company provides a wide array of services to clients across the United States and around the world, offering insightful and diversified expertise to the education industry. Since 1997 the Gilfus Education Group team has served thousands of universities, colleges, schools, academic content providers, and education and technology companies in meeting their mission-critical planning and technology needs.

Our group consists of individuals of the highest caliber talent and experience in educational research, strategy, planning, and technical implementation services representing capabilities for meeting organizational objectives and compliance, evaluating education quality and outcomes, and supporting technical integration, infrastructure, and delivery.

Fulfilling the Promise of Community through Technology

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Authors: *Stephen Gilfus*

Fulfilling the Promise of Community through Technology

Foreword

The Gilfus Education Group predicts that over the next few years, educators will make great progress in combining existing technology capabilities with the practices and theories of learning communities to develop a vigorous community learning platform which enables a richer set of educational experiences and facilitates the positive effects characterized by researchers. We are excited to share how a new paradigm of community, context and content can fulfill the greater promise of community increasing student engagement and academic achievement. The robust capabilities made possible by a Community Platform for Education could supersede and altogether displace the very notion of an LMS.

– Stephen Gilfus, Gilfus Education Group

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Learning Rooted in Communities

In 1935, Dr. John Maynard Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago opened his commencement address to the graduating class with a statement that reflected the research movement of the era, "A university is a community of scholars." He proposed that "The scholars who compose that community have been chosen by their predecessors because they are especially competent to study and to teach some branch of knowledge. The greatest university is that in which the largest proportion of these scholars are most competent in their chosen fields."

Today, communities remain instrumental to education. Schools and school districts are typically considered key assets to a community in the pursuit of educating children in fundamental skills. Moreover, most colleges and universities operate as dynamic communities themselves focused on learning and education in highly specialized disciplines and knowledge areas.

Most historians, sociologists and anthropologists agree that since ancient times the community has been the center of learning. In antiquity, community learning was focused on survival skills such as hunting, fishing, gathering, growing plants and domestication of animals. Parents, relatives and other community members, who knew how to perform a set of tasks necessary for survival, passed their knowledge onto children and adolescents through direct instruction.

As tools and processes became more complex, the knowledge and skills to use them became more specialized. Parents, relatives and neighbors could no longer teach children career survival skills. As such, many children were apprenticed to artisans or crafts people with specialized skills and tools for a particular trade.

Eventually education for work related tasks was organized so that basic knowledge could be conveyed in a classroom setting and applied skills could be practiced, developed and perfected while on-the-job. As an example, in Egypt, circa 2000 BC, education for learning work-related tasks originated as structured apprenticeships for scribes. Apprenticeships as a type of organized learning became widespread during the Middle Ages (approximately 500 to 1450 AD) where a craftsman would teach a child their expert craft. Groups of apprentices normally lived with the craftsman, and received food, clothing and shelter, with no direct pay since the learning of expert skills was considered highly valuable.

Guilds and associations which consisted of skills based communities comprised of people with similar interests and pursuits were an important part of apprenticeships. Guilds and associations established standards for quality, processes, practices and final products. The guild system which peaked during the Renaissance remained strong from approximately the years 1300 to 1650.

"A University is a community of scholars."

Overall, the research and practical evidence supports that the tools, methods and outcomes provided by community, collaborative and cooperative practices, generate a wealth of positive effects that greatly benefit students, educators and society as a whole. Positive effects of learning communities characterized by researchers include:

- Increased student engagement
- Enhanced instructor enthusiasm
- Improved academic achievement
- Better communications skills
- Higher class attendance
- Improved course completion rates
- Greater confidence
- Higher self-esteem
- Better sense of personal impact within groups
- Deeper awareness of others' needs
- Enriched socialization skills in professional settings
- Better assimilation into greater society.

During the last decades of the 20th century, several practices and theories emerged to refine at a micro-level, the concepts of learning within communities. Examples include Community of Interest, Community of Inquiry, Community of Practice, Knowledge Management, Community Based Learning, Cooperative Learning, and Learning Community Theory. Interestingly, most of the concepts mentioned here were first introduced circa 1991.

In the early to mid-1990s the promise of communities utilizing technology emerged as a prominent concept with the advent of the internet and the development of the World Wide Web. The development of Learning Management Systems (LMS) along with Administrative and Academic Portals further promised to bring powerful communities to life utilizing technology. More recently, social networking and "Web 2.0" technologies like Facebook and Twitter introduced new sets of capabilities for user groups and communities and made robust headway in establishing informal community practices.

Today there is a tremendous opportunity to combine existing technology capabilities with the practices and theories of learning communities to develop a vigorous community learning platform which enables a richer set of educational experiences and facilitates the positive effects characterized by researchers.

The Internet Evolves as a Foundation for Community

In its Brief History of the Internet, the Internet Society (ISOC) notes, "The Internet is as much a collection of communities as a collection of technologies, and its success is largely attributable to both satisfying basic community needs as well as utilizing the community in an effective way to push the infrastructure forward."

The fundamental driving force for Internet communications technologies was based on the critical need for government organizations and academic researchers to be able to communicate and share critical private information. In the 1980s and 1990s academic institutions primarily used the Internet for research purposes leveraging bulletin board communities, file sharing, listserv distribution lists and email communications.

Rooted in community, one of the most popular World Wide Web annotations is .com, the largest and most popular generic top-level domain in the Domain Name System of the Internet. The term is built upon the core concept of commerce and communities. Looking up the prefix com in a dictionary, one finds that the word literally means with, together and jointly. In this regard, one of the primary definitions of the word community is extremely relevant for describing some of the most advanced World Wide Web and Internet applications of the early 21st century, "an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location." Scanning the dictionary further for additional words with similar roots as community reveals a variety of concepts which not only appropriately describe the wealth of Web and Internet applications that are available, but provides insight into many critical areas that are still evolving. Examples include words such as connect, communicate and collaborate.

Email became pervasive within academic institutions in the late 1990s. A famous quote from one of Bill Gates' technical assistants at Microsoft stated, "Cornell is wired," characterizing the depth in which academic institutions were using technology. As one of the five supercomputer centers serving as a primary node for ARPANET, the precursor of the Internet, Cornell was indeed on the bleeding edge of email, web and technology usage.

Web browsers introduced easy-access to a massive "information highway," allowing users to easily surf the Web and access an endless volume of information. America Online (AOL) and other services brought the Internet to the general population, breaking through its academic-only existence, allowing almost anyone with a PC to explore a new and exciting vehicle of communication and introducing the concept of technology based community to the masses.

- collaborate, collaboration
- colleague
- college
- combination
- combine
- communal
- commune
- communicate,
- commerce
- commercial
- committee
- common
- communication

- communion
- companion, companionship
- company
- concourse
- concur, concurrence, concurrent
- confer, conference
- congregate, congregation
- connect, connected, connection
- convene, convention

The Promise of Academic Community

During the late 1990s, Course Management Systems (CMS) rose in popularity within higher education institutions allowing instructors to create Web sites for their courses by clicking a single button and uploading a few files. Replicating the in-class community, CMSs focused on the ability for instructors to post and distribute content to their students and provided basic course communication tools to facilitate greater interaction with students. Basic communication tools included course announcements, student groups and asynchronous discussion boards. At its core CMSs focused on transferring physical classroom paradigms to online environments in order to provide greater accessibility to course materials and activities and relieve the administrative burden on instructors.

Anytime, anywhere access to learning materials became possible and online courses thrived with instructors uploading more and more content, and students requesting access to courses with online materials. The promise of course community had begun with the simplest notion of allowing a student to access their syllabus, course text or latest assignment with the click of a button. In essence the CMS allowed individuals to share content around a learning context (the course) and as a result fostered an online learning community. As instructors used course environments more and posted additional content, increasing numbers of their students were drawn to it.

In early 2000, Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson, President of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, introduced the university's vision for the 21st century which declares that "The university community comprises a collection of communities: the campus community of students, faculty, staff, administration, and trustees lives in a series of larger neighborhood, city, and regional communities, and is supported by a broad national and international community of alumni, friends, business, and professional partners."

In response to this new line of thinking, new information portal technologies evolved outside of and within the academic community. Consumers began to use free portals such as Yahoo and MSN as their home pages for managing email, calendars, personal information management and news feeds. Academic institutions began to explore similar technologies for meeting the needs of their own communities, exploring ways to better organize tools and information for faculty, staff and students. Academic portals began to permeate higher education institutions providing content management capabilities and tools management for a broader internal audience.

Believing in the promise of dynamic communities, some CMS vendors began to develop academic portal technologies to meet this new need. As part of their marketing and sales efforts, these vendors also began to foster conversations around supporting student, faculty and departmental organizations by repurposing course environments. By combining the functionality of an academic portal system and a course

management system the first "community system" was born. The combination of academic portals with customizable modules of information and news feeds combined with a CMS for content management seemed destined to fulfill some of the core promises of educational communities.

Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler who served as the twelfth president of Columbia University from 1902 to 1945 wrote a famous essay titled, What is a University?, which he used for Columbia commencement addresses held innumerable times in front of the steps of the school's Law Library near the famous statue of Alma Mater. The address discussed the various aspects, ambitions and complexities of the modern university, and climaxed with Butler's statement, "A university is a collection of books."

The quote is also attributable to Fred Lewis Pattee, the first professor of English at The Pennsylvania State College in 1895. The dubious quote is chiseled in stone near the doors of the main entrance to the university library that bears his name on Penn State's campus. During the decades Butler and Pattee made the statement, "A university is a collection of books," libraries were the great databases of colleges and universities.

Although the combination of a CMS with associated academic portals generated many thoughtful discussions and debates about community paradigms, this combination of technologies has not been able to fulfill its promise of robust learning communities. Ironically, the content repository orientation of Course Management Systems and academic portal technology is more aligned to Butler's and Pattee's remark that "a university is a collection of books" then Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson's position on community.

The fundamental issue with today's popular CMSs, now affectionately known as Learning Management Systems (LMSs), is that they were initially designed to support course Web sites and anytime, anywhere access to content. The most significant level of collaboration was content sharing based on the LMS's core functionality as a content management system. Similarly, the essential feature for most academic portal technology is also a content repository providing collections of modular information designated for specific groups.

The concept of collaboration among students and between instructors and students was not a primary or essential requirement for the LMS or academic portals. By nature

"Collaboration and community was not a primary requirement for the LMS"

of their historical design and development, LMSs focus on content first, context second and community third. More often than not, brochure-ware flat content such as PDF documents and PowerPoint slides is the core of the learning experience, with the context being the course, and the community, the class of students. In fact, this logic path directly follows the best practices that many instructors and teachers are taught during training sessions on how to best utilize current LMS applications.

Determined to appease instructor and teacher desires for effective learning communities, most LMSs attempt to integrate a wide variety of collaboration and social technology tools including email, chat, blogs, wikis and discussion forums. Social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Delicious and many other "Web 2.0" technologies created new definitions and paradigms for technology based communities. In these technologies the focus is on building community first, providing context within that community second, and then sharing content within the community third, a direct opposite approach to existing Learning Management Systems.

By nature of their design, new social technologies provide a more accurate construct for building effective learning communities and enabling a set of richer community learning experiences. Realizing this new shift in thinking many existing LMSs go as far as to provide tools, links and interfaces into Facebook, MySpace, Ning and Twitter in order to maintain continued marketing messages that LMS's are meeting the need of today's academic institutions.

Seeing greater benefits in the paradigm shift to community, context, content many higher education institutions have already begun to make the shift from a traditional LMS to more social networking oriented environments including Ning (a white labeled social network), Word Press Campus (an open source multi-user blogging tool), Live@edu (a Microsoft based communications platform) and even directly to Facebook.

The switch to social networking technologies seems like a simple solution with a greater promise of more powerful learning communities. However, as effective as these technologies are at building community, they do not support many of the fundamental learning tools that an LMS provides. Although an LMS's primary function is that of a content management tool, over time they have evolved to address add/drop integration, learning units, tests, quizzes and grade books.

Today educators must sacrifice basic teaching and learning tools in an attempt to build community in newer social networking tools. Many faculty and academic institutions have come to appreciate the positive effects of learning communities and the various practices and theories that have shown to increase student engagement and improved academic achievement over and above the basic tools of an LMS.

By applying well-defined community practices and theories to social networking technology, educators can come closer than ever before to the promise of powerful learning communities.

NOT - Content, Context, Community

Community, Context, Content

Fulfilling the Promise of Community through Technology

Understanding Community Theories and Practices

There is a substantial body of research based on learning and education within community, collaborative, cooperative, competitive, and individualistic environment. There are literally tens of thousands of scholarly articles, reports, and studies that have been produced since the 1890s.

Understanding core community theories and practices grounded in learning and education provides a critical step in providing powerful technology-based learning communities. Furthermore, the overviews of the examples presented are intended to provide a fundamental sense of the various theories and practices. All of the descriptions provide the names of the original researchers, inventors and creators. By no means do the brief descriptions noted here capture the full depth and dimensions of the various models.

To gain a better understanding, please consult the various references listed in the bibliography. Please note that there are many more theories and practices in addition to those referenced.

Community of Inquiry

In 1991, Dr. Matthew Lipman, a renowned philosophy professor at Montclair State University in New Jersey introduced the notion of Community of Inquiry (COI). The COI concept describes a teacher-facilitated learning environment in which "students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions."

Dr. Randy Garrison, Dr. Terri Anderson and Dr. William Archer at the University of Calgary in Canada refined the COI concept into a model comprised of three mutually interacting and reinforcing elements of cognitive, social, and teaching presences.

1. Cognitive presence is the extent to which the participants in a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication.
2. Social presence is the ability of learners to project their personal characteristics into the community of inquiry, thereby presenting themselves as real people.
3. Teaching presence is defined as the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educational worthwhile learning outcomes.

Communities of Practice

In 1991 cognitive anthropologists Dr. Jean Lave and Dr. Etienne Wenger unveiled the concept of Community of Practice (CoP). As defined by Wenger, a CoP is a group of "people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." Learning can be the primary reason that the community comes together or an incidental outcome resulting from various interactions among members of the community.

In order for a CoP to exist, there must be three crucial elements: domain, community and practice.

- Domain: A CoP possesses an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.
- Community: Through pursuing interests within their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. Members build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.
- Practice: Members of the community are practitioners who develop a shared practice through a common collection of resources such as experiences, stories, tools, documents and methods for addressing problems. Developing and learning the practice requires repeated and sustained interactions among members over time.

In 2004, Dr. Paul Hildreth, a knowledge management scholar and practitioner, and Dr. Chris Kimble, a computer science professor at the University of York in the United Kingdom compiled an excellent reference on how the CoP concept has evolved over the years. The work summarizes contributions from a variety of researchers and demonstrates the practical benefits that CoPs can bring to an organization.

Community Based Learning

Community-Based Learning (CBL) refers to learning which takes place outside of the education institution, and draws on student experiences and encounters with members of the greater community. Examples include internships, practicum, field studies and community outreach programs. In many schools, the knowledge gained through CBL is integrated into a class through discussion and reflection.

For instance, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore promotes CBL initiatives such as:

- Students in a nutrition class evaluating community member's diets in a Baltimore neighborhood.
- Students in an engineering class designing a rainwater collection system for a local nonprofit organization.
- Students in a Spanish class teaching Spanish to elementary school children.

According to the Coalition of Community Schools, CBL has strong theoretical foundations:

- Knowledge is constructed and influenced by social interaction.
- Memory (the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information) is influenced by experience, prior learning, and practice.
- The motivation to learn is affected by personal judgments about one's abilities and the perceived importance and attainability of the learning goal.
- Individuals learn in different ways.
- Barriers to learning can be mitigated by protective factors such as supportive relationships and ample opportunities for participation.
- Effective learning environments intentionally connect all of the systems that affect the lives of students —home, school and community.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning (CL) which is also often called Collaborative Learning, takes place when two or more people attempt to learn something together. Collaborative learning is deeply rooted in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) theory introduced by pioneering psychologist and social constructivist Lev Vygotsky in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

Vygotsky defined ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers." In other words, the difference between what a learner can achieve without help versus with guidance and help.

In 1991, three professors at the University of Minnesota, Dr. David Johnson, an educational psychologist; his brother Dr. Robert Johnson, an instructional researcher with a strong interest in teaching science; and Dr. Karl Smith, a civil engineering education researcher outlined a formal framework for CL. According to the team, CL is instruction that involves students working in teams to accomplish common goals, under conditions that include five elements: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, appropriate collaborative skills, and group processing.

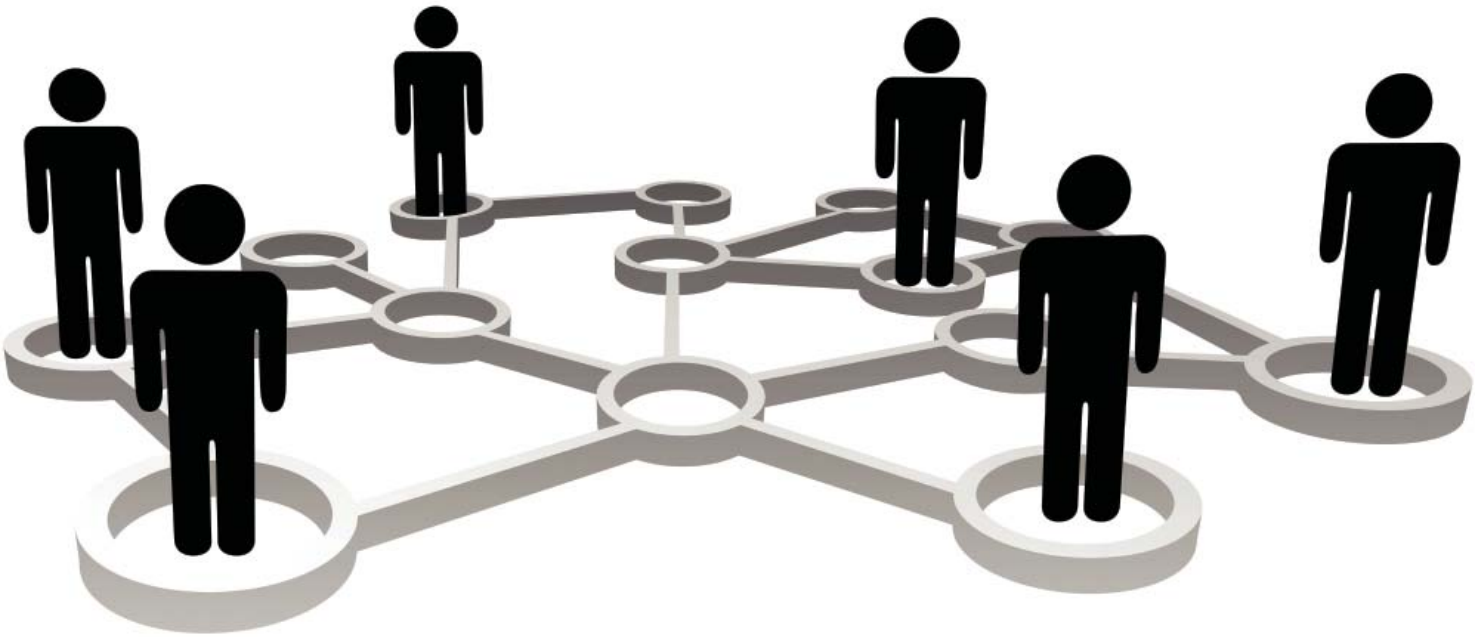
- Positive interdependence. Team members are obliged to rely on one another to achieve a goal. If any student team members fail to perform their part, everyone suffers consequences.
- Individual accountability. All students in a group are held accountable for performing their share of the work and for mastery of all of the materials to be learned.
- Promotive interaction. Although some tasks can be divided up and performed individually, some tasks must be done interactively, with group members providing each other with feedback, as well as dialoguing, encouraging, and teaching and each other.
- Appropriate collaborative skills. Students are encouraged to develop and practice trust-building, leadership, decision-making, communication, and conflict management skills.
- Group processing. Team members set group goals, periodically assess what they are performing and accomplishing as a team, and identify improvements they will make to function more effectively.

Learning Community Theory

A Learning Community (LC) is a group of people sharing common values and beliefs, who are actively engaged in learning together from each other. Dr. Faith Gabelnick, former Dean of the Honors College at Western Michigan University; Dr. Roberta S. Matthews, former associate dean for academic affairs at LaGuardia Community College; Dr. Jean Matthews and Dr. Barbara Leigh Smith, both scholars at the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education and Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington; are considered the founders of the learning communities movement in higher education.

In 1990, they defined an LC as, "[O]ne of a variety of curricular structures that link together several existing courses — or actually restructure the curricular material entirely — so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding of and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise." LCs have provided the foundation for a cohort-based, interdisciplinary approach to higher education. The founders of the movement identified five models of LC: linked courses, learning clusters, Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs), federated learning communities, and coordinated studies.

- Linked courses: Faculty teach individual courses, but typically engage in joint planning and assist students in finding connections between or among the content of courses. Generally instructors design at least one joint assignment. Typically students take two connected courses, such as a disciplinary course in history or biology combined with a skills course in writing, speech, or computer literacy.
- Learning clusters: Students take three or four clustered courses, usually with a common interdisciplinary theme uniting them.
- Freshman Interest Groups: Similar to a learning cluster, a group of students is enrolled together in the majority of their courses as a cohort. Often the students share the same major and they receive academic advising. The LC is based on the shared experiences of the students.
- Federated learning communities: Similar to a learning cluster, a faculty member accompanies students to classes as a "master learner" and facilitates a seminar course to help students grasp key concepts and draw connections between the various courses.
- Coordinated studies: Blurring the boundaries between individual courses, students enrolled in coordinated studies LCs are generally expected to reflect on their whole learning experience as a single, massive course that the group works on full-time for an entire semester.



"Learning Communities have provided the foundation for a cohort-based, interdisciplinary approach to Education. "

Knowledge Management

In 1991, Dr. Ikujiro Nonaka, an organizational theorist and professor emeritus of international business strategy at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, Japan, first published a set of observations about Knowledge Management. Essentially Knowledge Management (KM) consists of a variety of practices used by an organization to identify, create, represent, distribute, and enable adoption of insights and experiences. Such insights and experiences encompass knowledge, whether embodied in individuals or embedded in organizational processes and practices. The overarching goal of KM is to acquire, organize and communicate both tacit and explicit knowledge so that individuals can use it to be more productive and effective.

The central and integrating theme within various perspectives of KM is that knowledge is the most important source of learning, innovation, performance, wealth creation, and sustainable competitive advantage. An organization can use Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) to discover and make full use of the information it holds by correlating separate data and information sources to show how they can be applied and optimized.

According to Tom Davenport, a highly regarded Professor of Information Technology at Babson College in Massachusetts, there are at least ten pragmatic principles of KM for organizations to consider:

1. Knowledge management is expensive (but so is stupidity!)
    - Investments include knowledge capture, editing, categorizing, systems and training.
2. Effective management of knowledge requires hybrid solutions of people and technology.
    - For capturing, transforming, and distributing highly structured knowledge that changes rapidly, computers are more capable than people.
    - Humans are better at understanding knowledge, interpreting within a broader context, combining it with other types of information, and synthesizing various unstructured forms of knowledge.
3. Knowledge management is highly political.
    - This is rooted in the adage that knowledge is power.
4. Knowledge management requires knowledge managers.
    - Knowledge cannot be well managed until someone has clear responsibility for the job.
    - Tasks include collecting, categorizing, establishing technology infrastructure, and monitoring knowledge usage.

5. Knowledge management benefits more from maps than models, more from markets than from hierarchies.
    - Most organizations are better off letting the knowledge market work by simply providing and mapping the knowledge that its members seem to want.
6. Sharing and using knowledge are often unnatural acts.
    - There is a natural tendency for people to hoard knowledge and look suspiciously upon that from others.
7. Knowledge management means improving knowledge work processes.
    - If real improvements are to be made in knowledge management, improvements must be made in information intensive business processes.
8. Knowledge access is only the beginning.
    - Access is important, but successful knowledge management requires attention and engagement.
    - Members of an organization must seek active involvement with knowledge rather than being passive recipients.
9. Knowledge management never ends.
    - Categories of knowledge are always changing and growing.
10. Knowledge management requires a knowledge contract.
    - It is unclear in most organizations about who owns or has usage rights to the knowledge of its individual members.

Informal Versus Formal Learning

One significant characteristic that most of the community, collaborative and cooperative practices cited as examples have in common, is that informal learning (IL) plays a significant role. IL occurs through the experience of day-to-day situations. By its very nature, IL is somewhat elusive to define.

In 1974, Dr. Philip Coombs, vice-chair of the International Economic Development Council and Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, a philosopher and scholar from Pakistan, defined informal education in a report for the World Bank as "the lifelong process by which every individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment – at home, at work, at play: from the example and attitude of families and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally informal education is unorganized, unsystematic and even unintentional at times, yet accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning – including that of a highly 'schooled' person."

There are two other relative terms:

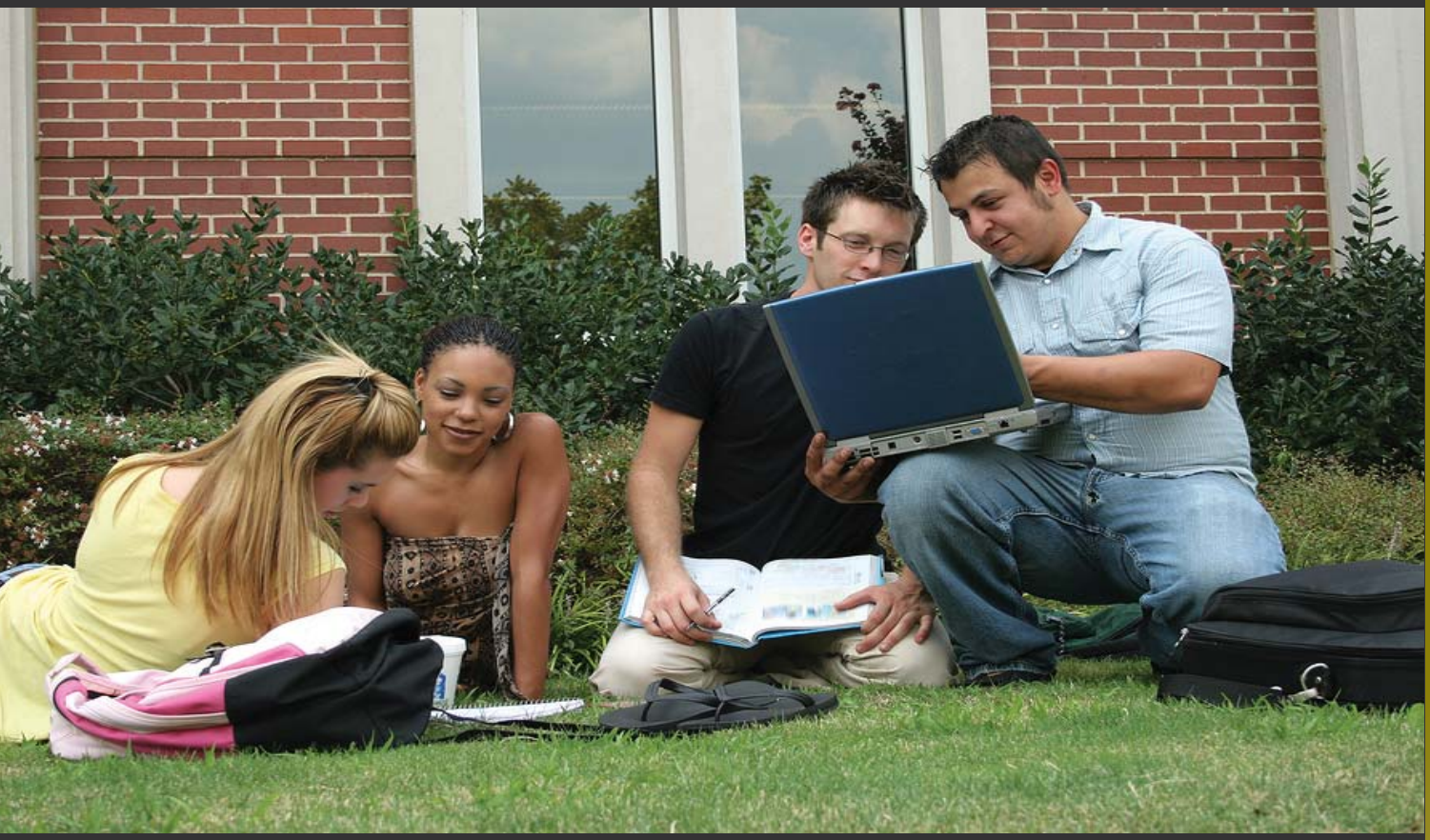
- Non-formal learning takes place within an organized program outside of a formal system from a source such as a community group.
- Formal learning takes place within an organized program that is part of the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded education system associated with schools and training institutes. It is typically recognized with grades, certificates and diplomas.

It is important to note that exact same learning techniques can exist across informal, non-formal and formal learning environments. Examples include explaining how to solve an algebra problem or demonstrating a proper golf swing. The classification is relative according to the organizational context in which the learning takes place. According to Dr. Mark K. Smith a Research Fellow YMCA George Williams College, London, the relative classification is mostly administrative.

For example, a student can learn basket weaving at a world class university. If the lesson takes place in a friend's dorm room, most likely the learning is classified as informal. If the lesson takes place as part of a workshop conducted by the arts and crafts club, it is likely that the learning is classified as non-formal. If the lesson takes place within a three credit Arts 101 class, the learning is likely to be classified as formal.

Similarly, an employee can learn a Javascript programming technique in the workplace. If the lesson takes place in a coworker's

office, most likely the learning is considered informal. If the lesson takes place as part of a brown bag lunch lecture series, it is likely that the learning is considered as non-formal. If the lesson takes place within a course that will result in a competency certificate upon successful completion, the lesson is likely to be considered as formal.



"Generally informal education is unorganized, unsystematic and even unintentional at times. "

Call for a Community Platform for Education

By no means do the learning theories cited, encompass all of the existing community and collaboration models. Despite the great body of knowledge, theories and practices about community and collaboration within learning and education, it is ironic that no major learning platform has been designed and implemented from the onset, based on one or more of these models. In fact by leveraging the rich body of educational, sociological, anthropological and organizational research there is a tremendous opportunity to create a vigorous community learning platform which enables a richer set of educational experiences.

The Gilfus Education Group hereby formally puts out a call for a cohesive Community Platform for Education that would take into consideration that universities and companies are collections of communities, incorporating the fundamental principles of the various community, collaborative and cooperative learning theories and practices. With advances in social networking technology and new media it is now feasible to combine community and social learning concepts with basic learning tools to finally realize the promise of a community platform for education.

Within each community, capabilities would be pedagogically appropriate for conveying the subject matter and supporting learning processes and tasks. Applications abound such as student orientation, group projects, joint problem solving, joint analysis, collaborative writing, collaborative design, individual assessments, group projects, debates, study teams, team building, tutoring, research projects, colloquia, special academic events, advising, counseling, mentoring, career services, student clubs, student government, honor societies, athletic coaching, fraternal events, graduation, student recruitment, and alumni activities.

For example, either a class or a club could be organized as a community. A student enrolling in the class or joining the club would still require a registration process for each community. Registering the student for the class would mostly likely take place via the college course registration system and require the payment of tuition through the bursar. Joining the club could be as easy as the student filling out an online form. However, once accepted as a member, the student's opportunities for interaction and collaboration within each community could be similarly robust regardless of whether the entity is a class or a club.

To support diverse community scenarios, a suite of applications within the Community Platform for Education would allow for various degrees of communication and collaboration to facilitate multiple dimensions of interactions among members (students, instructors and subject matter experts). Collaborative tools can be designed to promote an integrated, consistent, and cohesive user experience for the members of each community. Learning tools can be provided to support traditional processes and methods of knowledge retention, evaluation and testing, as well as group and individual based analytics.

In addition to benefitting students and instructors, a Community Platform for Education transcends and inspires better communications, literacy, and dimensions of knowledge, and motivates new norms for people and communities to work together. It is expected that a Community Platform for Education would fully embrace a multitude of education and learning theories, and by nature of its implementation, fundamental learning practices will continue to evolve and improve, and in turn further drive improvement to Web communication and collaboration capabilities. This will help fulfill the aspirations of the many generations of educators, psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists who have labored over the centuries in developing and providing understanding around the practice of more effective learning communities to achieve improved student success.

A cohesive Community Platform for Education requires a major shift in perspective from content as the primary organizing principle to the community as the primary organizing principle.

In fact, with a community-centric learning perspective, there may no longer be a need to make a major distinction between the capabilities of an LMS and an education portal. Moreover, the concept of CPE could supersede and altogether displace the very notion of an LMS.

"The concept of a CPE could supersede and altogether displace the very notion of an LMS."

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Gilfus Education Group
1050 Connecticut Avenue NW, 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

888.861.3375 Main
www.gilfuseducationgroup.com