

Teacher Educators Teaching and Learning Together: A Collaborative Self-study of Support within an Online Literacy Learning Community

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Abstract

In this self-study, five university instructors who taught the same online literacy course during a summer session formed an online learning community. Through engaging in e-mail exchanges, participating in online discussions, posting weekly teaching reflections, and visiting one another's online courses, they sought to answer the research question: How can an online literacy learning community support university instructors who teach various sections of a common online course? In answering the research question, the researchers identified the themes that were most prominent in their discussions and reflections, and also the themes that played minor roles in the forming of the literacy learning community.

Keywords: self-study, university instructor, online teaching and learning, literacy learning community, NVivo.

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing interest in exploring the construction of learning communities among teachers to achieve teaching excellence (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). A learning community is a persistent environment in which teachers reflect, interact, and collaborate with one another focusing on a common goal of improving practice for students' learning. In school settings, learning communities are used as a trajectory for teachers' professional development. Many teachers form groups with colleagues to reflect on teaching, administrators require teachers to collaborate across grade levels, and professional development providers offer opportunities to support teachers in teams (Nelson, 2008). In this self-study, five university instructors who taught the same online literacy course during a summer session formed an online learning community in order to support each other in their teaching practice and to ensure that students received the same high quality instruction in all course sections. They participated in online discussion forums, posted weekly teaching reflections, and visited one another's course sites to investigate the research question – How can an online literacy learning community support university instructors who teach various sections of a common online course?

Literature Review

Three terms in the research literature are associated with the concept of learning communities: professional learning communities (Sargent & Hannum, 2009; Vescio et al., 2008), communities of practice (Barab, MaKinster, & Scheckler, 2003; Sherer, Shea, & Kristensen, 2003; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), and literacy learning communities (Lent, 2007). Although defined differently, they all emphasize collaboration, the core concept in a learning community. Additionally, they share a similar assumption that learning is a situated practice; teachers gain knowledge through their interaction and reflection with others who share similar experiences (Vescio et al., 2008). Specifically, learning communities have eight characteristics in common: (a) shared knowledge, values, and beliefs; (b) overlapping histories among members; (c) mutual interdependence; (d) mechanisms for reproduction; (e) a common practice and/or mutual enterprise; (f) opportunities for interactions and participation; (g) a

meaningful relationship; and (h) respect for diverse perspectives and minority views (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Barab et al., 2003).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) describe three types of knowledge that teachers need and develop. The first type is “knowledge-*for*-practice,” which is the knowledge and theory that teachers learn from their formal education. The second type is “knowledge-*in*-practice,” which refers to essential knowledge embedded in practice that teachers learn in the field. Through this knowledge, teachers become reflective practitioners examining their own practice and seeking improvement in teaching. The third type is “knowledge-*of*-practice,” and it refers to the knowledge teachers generate beyond their classrooms and contribute to a professional community for peers’ interrogation and interpretation. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle,

[T]eachers across the professional life span play a central and critical role in generating knowledge of practice by making their classrooms and schools sites for inquiry, connecting their work in schools to larger issues, and taking a critical perspective on the theory and research of others (p. 273).

Active participation in a learning community has the potential to foster teachers’ “knowledge-*in*-practice” and “knowledge-*of*-practice” (Nelson, 2008). It is reported that participation in learning communities not only results in changes to teaching practices (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000; Strahan, 2003), but also increases teachers’ involvement, ownership, innovation, and leadership (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Phillips, 2003).

Like learning communities in school settings, university faculty build learning communities for professional and instructional development. Sherer et al. (2003) documented the outcomes of successful faculty-initiated learning communities at Miami University, Virginia Tech, Texas A&M University, and University of Wisconsin-Madison. Community members consisted of faculty in various disciplines including psychology, political science, business, sociology, education, and mathematics. These learning groups established a community in which they focused on improving teaching and learning on campus through e-mail communication and regular face-to-face meetings to discuss teaching and learning, provide peer support and collaboration, and share best practices. They shared syllabi, learned new software, shared computer and software resources, discussed specific challenges in designing problems and tests, ordered materials of common interest, and sought to understand how other disciplines’ approaches could enhance their own teaching and improve student learning. The group noted two major benefits of their participation including opportunities to meet new colleagues and enhance their knowledge of teaching.

Technology advancements provide increased opportunities for faculty members to move learning communities to online environments, making it easier to share and seek information at any time. Ke and Hoadley (2009) define an online learning community as “a developed activity system in which a group of learners, unified by a common cause and empowered by a supportive virtual environment, engage in collaborative learning within an atmosphere of trust and commitment” (p. 489). A variety of Internet tools, such as listservs, blogs, wikis, social networking forums, and course management systems, have made it easier to share and seek information among members of a community. Baldwin (1998) suggested a mutually supportive professorial model in the technologically advanced era. Sherer et al. (2003) emphasized the potential for online resources such as websites, online workshops and courses, virtual teaching and learning technology centers. Compared with a traditional face-to-face learning community, participants in online learning communities can seek support and offer input at any time, but Barab, MaKinster, and Scheckler (2003) caution that such participation can also be challenging. First, unlike traditional learning communities which are self-organizing and emerging in response to particular local conditions and the needs of the participants, online learning communities require considerably more initial design work related to the online tool. Second, learning the online tool can be time consuming and challenging to some participants, which may hinder active participation. Finally, an online learning community requires high levels of trust, impacting the extent of sharing and the attitude toward criticism among participants.

A survey conducted in numerous higher education institutions across North America suggested that many institutions currently struggle with the question of how technology can be used to extend conversations within faculty learning communities (Vaughan, 2004). Results indicated that 90 percent of the responding university faculty (63 of 70) used some form of computer-mediated communication, such as e-mail or online discussion groups, to support their interaction within learning communities. E-mail systems were the most commonly used tools (98.4%), followed by online discussion forum tools (42.9%), websites (49.2%), course management systems (27%), and virtual chat tools (7.9%).

Sherer et al. (2003) suggested building an online portal to support faculty learning communities. A portal is “a centralized, customized area on the Internet that manages vast amounts of information and links a community easily and efficiently” (p. 190). They argued that a faculty learning community portal provides an online platform for faculty to exchange questions and answers, share ideas, and carry on discussions. Three guidelines were suggested for building an electronic platform and were considered in the design of the current study: (a) use well-established software with which the technical support staff has experiences, (b) take a developmental approach; develop the portal piece by piece, (c) make sure the resulting portal is user-friendly.

As teacher preparation programs are increasingly accountable for the performance of their graduates and the students these graduates teach, efforts to ensure that students are receiving the same high quality instruction and similar experiences in course sections across instructors are becoming the norm. In this particular study, five university instructors were charged with teaching various sections of the same online literacy education course during a summer session and were to use the same text, syllabus, activities, and assessments. Among the five instructors, two had never taught the course and one instructor had no prior online teaching experience. Furthermore, the course had recently been redesigned from a full-term course design to accommodate the short summer session. In order to better support each other and to ensure that students received the same high quality instruction, the faculty teaching the course decided to use the course management system Moodle as the platform to build a literacy learning community to share ideas and support one another’s teaching throughout the duration of the course. Through engaging in e-mail exchanges, participating in online discussions, posting weekly teaching reflections, and visiting one another’s Moodle course sites, they sought to answer the research question— How can an online literacy learning community support university instructors who teach various sections of a common online course?

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism served as the theoretical framework for the study. Au (1998) discussed the application of social constructivism to research on school literacy learning and explained, “Themes in constructivist work include active engagement in processes of meaning-making, text comprehension as a window on these processes, and the varied nature of knowledge, especially knowledge developed as a consequence of membership in a given social group” (p. 299). In this study, the online literacy learning community was the social group and members collaborated and learned from each other in order to improve teaching.

The context in the current study is also reflected in Au’s statement, “Social constructivists argue that the very terms by which people perceive and describe the world, including language, are social artifacts” (p. 299). The learning expected in this case was more incidental than “instructor-guided” and in that sense allowed for a more open and freer description of the process of the interactions among faculty members.

This research rests solidly in a constructivist framework, more specifically perhaps, a social constructivist framework in which the instructors interacted with one another in several contexts as they all engaged in the process of teaching various sections of the same introductory course, collaborated and supported each other in this environment, and constructed knowledge within the community.

Methodology

Self-study methodology was employed to investigate the collaboration and knowledge generation that resulted from this faculty online literacy community (Dinkelman, 2003; Russell, 1998; Zeichner, 1999). Guided by Fonteyn, Vettese, Lancaster, and Bauer-Wu’s (2008) model for content analysis within a group, themes (nodes) were developed individually and then imported to NVivo to guide group data analysis.

Data Collection

Data sources in this study included (a) weekly reflection journals, (b) question and answer posts on Moodle discussion board (course management software), and (c) e-mail messages. During the five-week university summer session, five instructors composed and submitted a weekly reflection journal to the Moodle site used to support self-study of their group’s collaborative learning experience. Journal entries ranged from 200 -1,000 words. Group members agreed their journal entries would reflect open and honest discussion of everything related to the teaching of the course. Journal entries were posted each Friday and related responses and discussion ensued as each week progressed. An additional discussion forum on Moodle was titled “Questions and Answers” and was designed for the instructors to support one another by sharing information and posting questions over the course of the summer session. In addition

to these two discussion forums, each instructor was also asked to keep a record of any additional e-mail messages related to the course that were sent and received.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began by compiling all the information shared within Moodle discussion forums and the e-mail exchanges, resulting in a total of 11 documents. Two documents named *Weekly Journals* and *Questions and Answers* were created for each of the five instructors. A final document, *E-mail Summary*, was compiled including all the e-mail exchanges among the five instructors.

Next, all documents were imported to NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Several steps were involved in developing themes. First, the instructors read their own weekly journals and questions/answers and openly coded their data sources, keeping the research question (How can an online literacy learning community support university instructors who teach various sections of a common online course?) in mind. Then, the instructors met to discuss the open codes to look for consensus, and place the approved open codes into categories. Next, each person read another person's data set to ensure that the approved codes were accurate, resulting in initial categories being refined and expanded. For examples, some of the categories identified included *reflection on assignments*, *course design from instructors' perspective*, and *seeking input for technical issues*. Based on this process, four themes were developed and imported to NVivo to guide the coding of all data sources (Figure 1).

Literacy Learning Community – LLC
Statements including comments about building LLC, questions about the LLC, and the importance of interacting with the LLC.
Subthemes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Seeking and Providing Input about the LLC – SP-LLC</i> - Statements including seeking and offering help about the LLC. • <i>Knowledge Obtained – K</i> – Statements reflecting knowledge obtained from LLC. • <i>Learning Application – A</i> – Statements on applying what had been learned to teaching, including what we had learned from each other, from professional development opportunity (Camp Speight), and from prior teaching.
Course Design – CD
Any statement reflecting the development of the course (Module) and the implementation of the course.
Subthemes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reflection on Assignment – RA</i> – Statements indicating instructors' reflection on the course assignments. • <i>Reflection on Teaching and Learning – RTL</i> – Statements indicating instructors' reflection on teaching the course, issues related with grading and providing feedback to students, and students' learning. • <i>Seeking and Providing Input – SPI</i> – Statements indicating seeking and providing information and resources in terms of course content and technical issues.
Faculty Workload – FW
Statements reflecting faculty's workload in the summer session, including teaching load, and learning new technologies.
Course Mentor – CM
Statements on serving as the course mentor, including issues related to the role of course mentor.

Figure 1. Themes/Nodes

These themes were Literacy Learning Community (LLC) which included comments about building the LLC, questions about the LLC, and comments about the importance of interacting within the LLC; Course Design (CD) which included any statement reflecting the development and/or implementation of the course; Faculty workload (FW) which included statements made that reflected the faculty's workload in the summer session, including teaching load, grading load, and learning new technologies; and Course Mentor (CM) which included statements on being the course mentor, including issues related to the role of course mentor.

Two themes contained related subthemes. The LLC included the subthemes of Seeking and Providing Input (SP-LLC) about the LLC including statements seeking and offering assistance related to the LLC; Knowledge Obtained (K) including statements reflecting some knowledge gained from participation in the LLC; and Learning Application (A) including statements on applying what was learned from participation in the LLC, from professional development, and from prior teaching. The theme of CD contained the subthemes of Reflection on Assignment (RA) made up of statements made by the instructors reflecting course assignments; Reflection on Teaching and Learning (RTL) which included statements reflecting on teaching the course, issues related to grading and providing feedback to students, and students' learning; and Seeking and Providing Input (SPI) which included statements seeking or providing information and/or resources in terms of course content and technical issues. The results are examined first by the four overarching themes by data source and then by individual themes or subthemes across data sources.

A final step involved identifying and comparing the coding results. Each instructor coded two other instructor's *Weekly Journals* and *Questions and Answers* in NVivo to ensure that everyone's data was coded accurately. The *E-mail Summary* data set was coded in the same cross-participant manner. Once the coding of all data sets was complete, a template was created to report (a) total number of coded instances, (b) sample representative transcript units, (c) agreement average, and (d) comments/notes for each participant's data set. Each participant reviewed another's data set to determine agreement average between the two coders. Data was reviewed and recoded if the agreement average was lower than 75 percent. Actual inter-rater agreement average was above 90 percent. Descriptive statistics were obtained, and findings and conclusions were drawn from these documents and are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Results

The results indicated several major themes related to the research question. In answering the research question, "How can an online literacy learning community support university instructors who teach various sections of a common online course?" the researchers explored the themes that were most prominent in the instructors' discussions and reflections, and the themes that played minor roles in the discussion within the online literacy learning community.

Prominent Themes - Course Design and Literacy Learning Community

Analysis of the data revealed that Course Design (CD) was the most prominent theme with the coded references of 220 out of the total 445 (49.4%), followed by Literacy Learning Community (LLC) with the coded references of 161 (36.2%), Faculty Workload (FW) with the coded references of 33 (7.4%), and Course Mentor (CM) with the coded references of 31 (7.0%) (Table 1 and Figure 2).

The majority of the references to CD were contained in the *Weekly Journal* forum with 126 of the 220 resulting from this data source. Most of these references, 43, were to CD in general, while the subthemes of Reflection on Assignment (RA) and Reflection on Teaching and Learning (RTA) were referenced less often at 33 and 32 times respectively. Of the remaining 94 references to CD, 55 resulted from the *Question and Answer* forum with the subtheme of Seeking and Providing Input (SPI) related to CD making up the bulk of these references with 27. *E-mail* data provided the remaining 39 references to CD with the majority of these again related to the subtheme of SPI on the course design (Table 2).

The other prominent theme in the data was the LLC theme which was referenced 161 times in the data sources. The source of most of the references to the LLC, 65, was *Weekly Journals* posted on Moodle. The subtheme of Seeking and Providing Input about the LLC (SP-LLC) provided 28 of these references, while the general theme of LLC provided 20. *E-mail* provided 51 of the remaining references to the LLC theme. These references were nearly evenly divided between general references to the LLC, 26, and references to SP-LLC, 25. The *Question and Answer* forum on Moodle provided the least references, 45, with most coded references on SP-LLC (Table 3).

Table 1. Themes by Data Source

Themes	Weekly Journal	Q and A	E-mail	Total
CD	126	55	39	220
LLC	65	45	51	161
FW	25	3	5	33
CM	10	9	12	31
Total	226	112	107	445

*CD – Course Design, LLC – Literacy Learning Community, FW – Faculty Workload, CM – Course Mentor

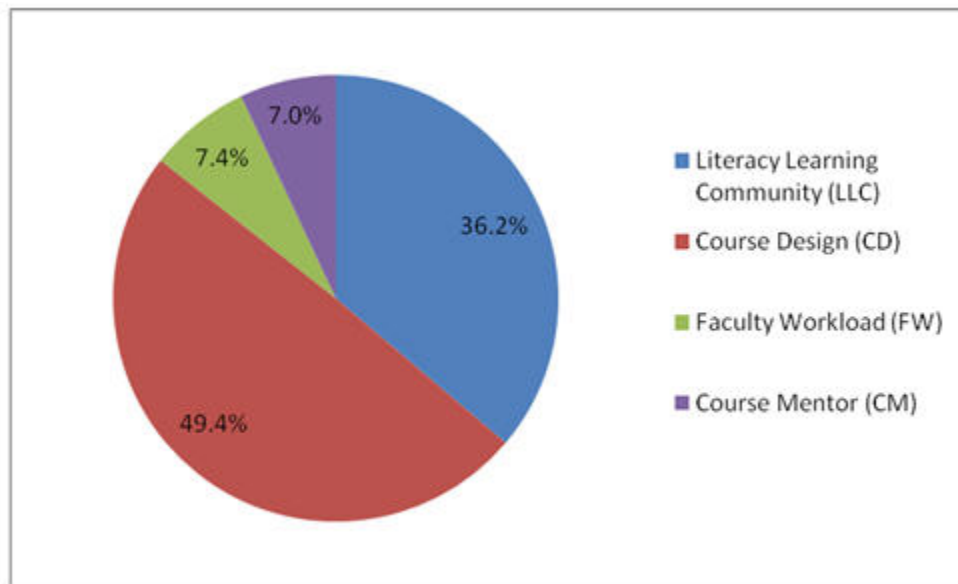


Figure 2. Themes by Data Source in Percentage

Table 2. Summary of Subthemes under Course Design

Themes/ Subthemes	Weekly Journal	Q and A	E-mail	Total
CD general	43	2	5	50
RA	33	12	4	49
RTL	32	14	6	52
SPI	18	27	24	69
CD Total	126	55	39	220

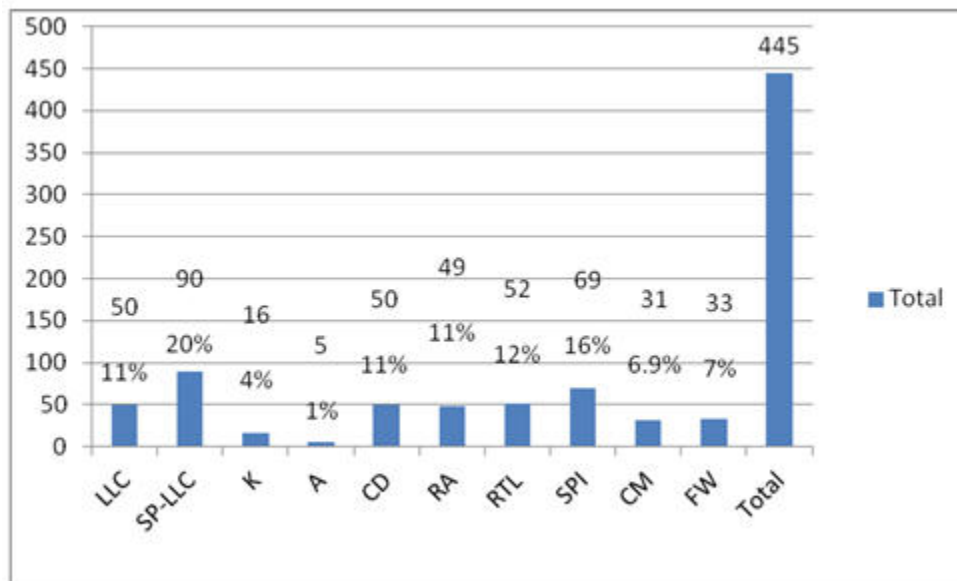
*CD general – Course Design General, RA – Reflection on Assignment, RTL – Reflection on Teaching and Learning, SPI – Seeking and Providing Input

Prominent Subtheme - Seeking and Providing Input about the Literacy Learning Community. While the theme of CD including the subthemes of RA, RTL, and SPI related to course design was the most frequently referenced in the data, the single most frequently occurring theme or subtheme across the data sets was that of SP- LLC (Figure 3). Ninety out of the 445 coded references (20%) were categorized under SP-LLC. This subtheme was characterized by members of the LLC seeking and offering help about the LLC. One LLC member wrote: “It has been interesting to see the e-mails and posts flying around about grading and responding to students. It feels much less isolating to be able to share reflections on our teaching and ideas for improving our teaching.”

Table 3. Summary of Subthemes under Literacy Learning Community

Themes/ Subthemes	Weekly Journal	Q and A	E-mail	Total
LLC	20	4	26	50
SP-LLC	28	37	25	90
K	13	3	0	16
A	4	1	0	5
LLC Total	65	45	51	161

*LLC – Literacy Learning Community, SP-LLC – Seeking and Providing Input about the Literacy Learning Community, K – Knowledge Obtained, A – Learning Application



*LLC – Literacy Learning Community, SP-LLC – Seeking and Providing Input about the Literacy Learning Community, K – Knowledge Obtained, A – Learning Application, CD – Course Design, RA – Reflection on Assignment, RTL – Reflection on Teaching and Learning, SPI – Seeking and Providing Input, CM – Course Mentor, FW – Faculty Workload.

Figure 3. Summary of Individual Themes and Subthemes

Prominent Subtheme – Seeking and Providing Input. The second most frequently occurring theme or subtheme across data sets was that of SPI related to the course design. Sixty-nine of the 445 coded references (16%) were placed under the SPI subtheme. This subtheme referred to statements indicating seeking and providing information and resources in terms of course content and technical issues. One member of the LLC stated: “After teaching this course for three weeks, how do you like the response log, discussion, and video discussion assignments? In my course, I have to admit that I see some repetition.”

Prominent Subtheme – Reflection on Teaching and Learning. With 52 references (12%), the subtheme of RTL was almost as frequently referenced across sources. This subtheme included statements indicating instructors’ reflection on teaching the course, issues related to grading and providing feedback to students, and students’ learning. One LLC member wrote:

I wonder if others are spending as much time as I am grading. I know the time I spend now will make it easier later in the course, because students generally use the feedback and get better at responding, so I can spend less time correcting. It’s painful now though!

Prominent Subthemes – Literacy Learning Community General and Course Design General. Two themes occurred with equal frequency across the data sources. These included general references to the LLC and CD. Fifty out of 445 coded references (11%) were placed under the LLC theme. This theme included statements and comments about building the LLC, questions about the LLC, and the importance of interacting within the LLC. One member of the LLC commented: "It has been a learning experience and it has been helpful to have others to share ideas with and to answer questions that come up." Another 50 of the 445 coded references (11%) fell into the general CD theme. This theme referred to any statement in which instructors reflected upon the development of the course (Module) and the implementation of the course. One member of the LLC stated: "I definitely like combining the response log and the discussion board. I think that might help with grading as well particularly in the summer session."

A final subtheme that occurred with some frequency was the subtheme of RA. Forty-nine of the 445 coded references (11%) were placed under the RA subtheme. This category included statements indicating instructors' reflection on the course assignments. One LLC member commented:

There have been a couple of posts/e-mails about the course that really have me thinking about some changes when I teach this course next session. For example....the literacy history assignment – I have only issued this assignment in face-to-face courses so I didn't consider that students feel uncomfortable sharing negative experiences with the entire class by posting their papers on the discussion board.

Minor Themes – Course Mentor and Faculty Workload

Themes that occurred in the data with less frequency included the primary themes of Course Mentor (CM) and Faculty Workload (FW) and two of the subthemes related to the LLC, Knowledge Obtained (K) and Learning Application (A).

Thirty-one of the 445 coded references (6.9%) collected were classified under the CM theme, which included statements on being the course mentor, including issues related to the role of the course mentor. The course mentor wrote:

I feel a tremendous amount of responsibility in being the course mentor and putting the course together for a diverse group of instructors. In our (reading faculty member's) efforts to align courses across sections, I sometimes fear that we will stifle the creativity, preferences, and personal touches of each individual instructor when creating courses. That said, I tried to take each person's contribution and cobble together a cohesive course.

Thirty-three of the 445 coded references (7%) were categorized as FW, which contained statements that reflect faculty's workload in the summer session, including teaching load, grading load, and learning new technologies. One member of the LLC commented: "I agree that grading the discussion threads for the reading and practicum assignments along with the reflection logs will be quite time consuming." Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of references to FW, 25 of the 33 references, were included in the *Weekly Journal*. Only five references to FW resulted from e-mail exchanges and a mere three from the *Question and Answer* forum.

Minor Subtheme – Knowledge Obtained. Sixteen out of 445 coded references (4%) fell under the K subtheme and included statements made by the LLC members that reflected on knowledge obtained from the LLC. One LLC member stated: "I agree about the dialogue and benefiting from it. I have definitely benefitted just from having the reassurance that I am on the right track and teaching what others are teaching."

Minor Subtheme – Learning Application. Only five entries of the 445 coded references (1%) were placed under the A subtheme making it the least frequently occurring theme or subtheme in the data. This theme included statements applying what was learned in the LLC, including information learned from each other, from professional development and from the prior teaching experiences. One LLC member wrote: "I feel so good that I am currently teaching an online course and will be teaching again during second summer session because I really want to change things to make my teaching much better! I am so excited..."

What This Means for Teacher Educators: Implications for Practice

It is evident from the results in this study that the online literacy learning community, established through sharing weekly journals, posting in the Question and Answer discussion forum, and exchanging e-mail messages, has served as an advantageous platform for the five instructors to reflect on teaching and carry on discussions and communications to support each other's teaching. For this learning community, seeking and providing input on the design of the common course proved to be the most common function of the methods of information exchange within the community. The results suggest that teachers need a

space to discuss course design issues throughout the duration of the course. Regardless of organization and planning ahead of the time, teachers still had questions and sought input throughout the facilitation of the course. In this study, the instructors discussed the effectiveness of course activities, assignments, and evaluation methods using students' feedback as evidence within the online literacy learning community. Through this evidence-based discussion, they sought ways to better design the course in the future, and this has been supported by literature that the purpose of a redesign of the course is to enhance learning, using students as evaluators (Lee, 2009; Pape & Wicks, 2009). This is also a type of "knowledge-*in-practice*" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) that teachers can only obtain from the teaching experience.

Teaching is an isolating activity; however, there is merit in opening the doors of communication to discuss problems and issues related to teaching and learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2001), especially with others who are teaching the same course. It is not the purpose of the study to advocate that each section of the course should or will look exactly alike. Rather, each instructor brings her or his own style to the course and the literacy learning community fostered a sense of communication that was beneficial in terms of sharing resources, problem solving, and future course planning. As this study demonstrates, this is an area where literacy learning communities have great potential for supporting faculty as they develop and implement common core courses.

The online literacy learning community served as the platform for these instructors to construct "knowledge-*in-practice*" and "knowledge-*of-practice*" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). In seeking input from others about course activities, assignments, grading, and so on, the instructors sought to expand their knowledge base as they grappled with their understanding of the course and particular course content. They discovered additional approaches that they might have been unfamiliar with and alternative ways of viewing assignments, students, and content. They created new knowledge embedded in practice and shared this knowledge within a learning community, and in this way, contributed to the profession.

In this online literacy learning community, members also demonstrated characteristics of being teacher-learners. Even though Knowledge Obtained and Learning Application were the least coded categories, one member reported learning from the group members about giving positive feedback and praising students with email messages. Another member reported applying what she learned from a technology workshop to her current teaching. This teacher-as-learner approach has been supported in the literature that "instructors will benefit from an ability to network with others involved in the online education, continually evaluating themselves and their skills, and in effect, becoming a lifelong learner" (Smith, 2005, p. 7). Palloff and Pratt (2001) emphasized a learner-centered approach to ensure effective online teaching. They stated,

Attention needs to be paid to the developing sense of community within the group of participants in order for the learning process to be successful. The learning community is the vehicle through which learning occurs online. Members depend on each other to achieve the learning outcomes for the course...Without the support and participation of a learning community, there is no online course (p. 29).

Their statement does not only suggest ways of establishing a successful online program, but also applies to the current situation of teachers as learners. The literacy learning community members worked to foster the development of a community of learners.

Finally, the results of this study imply areas for future research. Members in this online literacy learning community relied on the discussion forums on Moodle and e-mail messages as ways of communication, which have been suggested as popular ways for faculty to extend conversation (Vaughan, 2004). However, as technology advances, it should be interesting to explore how other internet tools, such as blogs, wikis, social networking forums, can be used in an online literacy learning community to support teaching and learning. Furthermore, additional research should also be conducted to investigate the extent to which online environments support and potentially encourage the development of learning communities within higher education, which online platforms seem to best support these communities, and how these communities impact instruction and the learners within courses taught by faculty engaging in online learning communities.

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