

Free Asynchronous Professional Development By, From, and For Instructional Designers: How Informal Learning Opportunities Shape Our Professional Learning and Design Practices

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Instructional designers (IDs) need to maintain an understanding of the current trends and issues within the field. Pursuing professional learning informally supports IDs' effort to keep up with current trends and issues because it is not restricted by curriculum and time. Professional development (PD) offered by Professional Development for Instructional Designers (PD4IDs) learning group can address issues related to geographical and funding limitations. This application paper presents the coordination of PD based on the conceptual framework (e.g., Community of Practice and Social Network Knowledge Construction) and reflections of several PD4IDs members with various roles. The reflections indicate the benefits of participating in PD for shaping IDs' professional learning and practices. Discussion and implications for IDs intending to pursue non-traditional PD are also presented.

Introduction

Working professionals should keep up with the field and continuously learn to improve their knowledge and skills to stay current. Instructional designers (IDs) are not exempted, especially since the instructional design field constantly evolves alongside the rapid development of technologies (Sharif & Cho, 2015). As Sharif and Cho (2015) have mentioned, continuously improving knowledge, skills, and attitude related to the instructional design process is one of the competencies stated in the 2012 International Board of Standard for Training, Performance, and Instruction. This competency applies to IDs regardless of their work setting (e.g., K-12, higher education, business, government, etc.) and location (e.g., within the U.S. or worldwide) (Instructional Design Competencies: The Standards, n.d.).

By pursuing professional development (PD), working professionals also support their organizational performance (Yanchar & Hawkley, 2015). Therefore, employers support their employees' participation in non-traditional PD programs to meet the practical learning needs (Yanchar & Hackey, 2015). Such non-traditional PD opportunities may include informal learning that is not bounded by a specific curriculum, allowing working professionals to acquire just-in-time knowledge and expertise (Richter et al., 2011).

Professionals pursue continual PD due to the dynamic job demands (Littlejohn, 2017). When a new task involving new steps arises, working professionals do not hesitate to reach out to their networks who may have performed similar new tasks and ask for advice; particularly, they believe that the strategies from those who have been in similar new tasks are more effective (Littlejohn, 2017). The technology-enhanced learning environments supporting social interactions play an imperative role in this regard, wherein the Social Network Knowledge Construction (SNKC) framework can provide guidance for working professionals to interact with, communicate with, and learn from the peers within their social networks (Dawley, 2009).

Working professionals are willing to take advantage of technologies to enhance their knowledge and skills without limited by geographical and temporal constraints (Muljana et al., 2020). For example, IDs encountering budget, traveling, and time constraints perceive the value of joining online Community of Practice (CoP) groups enabled through social media (Muljana et al., 2020). Online CoP allows IDs to participate flexibly; they can adjust their participation level (e.g., whether they seek information only or contribute to the collective knowledge) according to their professional learning needs and time availability (Muljana et al., 2020; Schwier et al., 2014). To support IDs who needed PD

without being limited by such constraints, a CoP-based learning community called Professional Development for Instructional Designers (PD4IDs) was formed to offer free asynchronous PD events for IDs once or twice a year.

The purpose of this application paper is to describe the conceptual framework, how PD4IDs learning community facilitates free PD events for IDs, and the coordination process of the PD events, as aligned with the conceptual framework. Additionally, the paper includes reflections of the learning community members regarding how participating in the PD events may have influenced their engagement level in the community over time, professional learning experiences, and instructional design practices. Discussion and implications for IDs intending to pursue non-traditional PD are also presented, which inform (a) practitioners regarding ways to pursue just-in-time informal PD opportunities, (b) those with supervisory roles for supporting emerging informal PD outlets that are achieved through interactions with social networks, and (c) leaders who are interested in offering informal learning opportunities. As more non-traditional PD outlets may emerge due to advanced technologies, this paper may additionally offer insights to working professionals outside the instructional design and technology field in regard to ideas for acquiring or providing informal professional learning that is not restricted by geographical and temporal boundaries.

Conceptual Framework

The formation of PD4IDs and facilitation of free PD events for IDs are aligned with CoP and Social Network Knowledge Construction (SNKC). The following sections present each concept in detail; in addition to describing how both concepts are manifested in the efforts to provide free PD within PD4IDs.

Community of Practice

Community of Practice (CoP) is a community or group where people with common interests and goals can gather to learn together (Wenger et al., 2002). Facilitating a CoP group can help people improve their knowledge and expertise (Wenger et al., 2002) as CoP includes three key components: (1) a domain of shared interests, in which the members share and thus display a level of their knowledge and competence; (2) interaction, allowing members to learn together through activities, seeking and sharing information, and discussion; and (3) shared experiences or practices, displaying the collective knowledge as a result of the interaction among members (Wenger, 1998; Wesely, 2013). Because of the domain of shared interests, the CoP members share a commitment and passion about the domain, respect the collective knowledge, and are eager to learn from each other

(Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Because of the interaction, the CoP members can participate in discussions and activities that further generate shared experiences and practice in the form of dialogues and resources (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Participation in CoP is voluntary. The members are welcome to participate at any level. For example, the members may serve as a core (e.g., facilitator), active (e.g., members who do not mind sharing insights in addition to learning from others), or peripheral members (e.g., members who prefer to obtain information, rather than actively participating in discussions (Wenger et al., 2002). The core members of an online CoP group are typically expected to lead the community, transforming the information sharing activities into knowledge construction, which can be challenging as it takes time (Gray, 2004). As suggested by Lave and Wenger (1991), new members may start from the peripheral participation so that they can observe how the active and core members interact and learn from their information exchange. Gradually, the comfort, confidence, and trust levels of the new members will increase, which can encourage further participation (Muljana et al., 2020; Gorrell et al., 2013; Tseng & Kuo, 2014). This suggests that the members who are perceived as passive may be strategic about their participation level (Romero-Hall et al., 2020). We also recognize the members' challenges of adjusting their participation levels. Most of the members are working professionals; therefore, they may have time constraints that prevent them from increasing their participation levels (Muljana et al., 2020; Gray, 2004; Preece et al., 2004). They typically "put their participation on the back burner" because they have to prioritize their duties and tasks at work (Gray, 2004, p. 29).

Facilitating a CoP group can be performed online by taking advantage of modern technologies. As a result, an online CoP can bring people together regardless of their location and time zone (Muljana et al., 2020; Woo, 2015). It also potentially addresses the budget limitations that working professionals may face (Eaton & Pasquini, 2020). Online CoP, serving as a virtual space, provides learning opportunities through the interactions among members that help the members combat the isolation feeling, regardless of their participation levels. For instance, peripheral members can learn from and be inspired by the more active members' postings, such as the stories of experiences and discussions of problems, even without contributing (Gray, 2004). When members have time limitation, they can still take advantage of the online CoP discussion; they may simply read the online discussions and perceive the key takeaways without responding (Preece et al., 2004). For the more active members, actively posting discussions also serves as a way to gain multiple perspectives from others, providing opportunities to challenge their own perspectives (Gray, 2004). Participating in and observing

diverse dialogues in an online CoP additionally provide opportunities for the members to reflect on their own practices, potentially informing and shaping their professional practices (Akerson et al., 2009). We particularly pay close attention to these characteristics and potentials of online CoP when we coordinate our CoP-based PD events, which are described in a following section.

Social Network Knowledge Construction (SNKC)

Social Network Knowledge Construction (SNKC) is another framework considered during the facilitation of PD4IDs learning community. SNKC explains how people interact with one another and learn from each other in a technology-enhanced environment, such as one that uses social network communication mechanisms (Dawley, 2009). Additionally, SNKC also provides a description of how the knowledge constructed from the social network communication may influence learners' thinking process about future decisions on their further interaction or participation (Dawley, 2009). We include this framework because it can complement CoP. Essentially, CoP describes the interaction level of the members (e.g., peripheral, active, and core), whereas SNKC can serve as a guideline for the members on how to increase their participation level.

Dawley's (2009) SNKC framework includes five levels of social network engagement, originally aimed at helping an instructor introduce social technological tools to students and pace the engagement or participation levels. While our learners are mostly working professionals, this framework is helpful to guide them in exploring learning opportunities through a social-technology-enabled learning environment according to their comfort and experience levels. These five levels of social network engagement are (1) identify, providing opportunities to identify which social networks suitable for pursuing professional learning; (2) lurk, allowing people to observe the learning community or environment and identifying the purpose of it; (3) contribute, encouraging the participation and contribution; (4) create, allowing the knowledge creation within the learning environment; and (5) lead, motivating those who are already comfortable to acquire leadership opportunities.

We can juxtapose the aforementioned five levels of social network engagement with the context of instructional designers' non-traditional professional development. For example, in level 1, working professionals like IDs may locate potential learning opportunities that can support their just-in-time professional learning needs, whether it is an online CoP or other format. In level 2, IDs may read the contributions made by others, such as the information shared and the dialogues occurring in the discussions. In level 3, IDs may begin to participate by

making an introduction and asking questions. According to Dawley (2009), these individuals may gradually share their insights, experiences, and work to participate in active discussion. In level 4, IDs may increase their participation through knowledge creation; in the context of our PD, we provide opportunities for IDs to facilitate PD in the form of an asynchronous module and lead discussion surrounding their module topics. In level 5, IDs may acquire a leadership opportunity, such as by getting involved in the coordination of PD events; in our context, one member joined the leadership team at a later time and was given a choice to determine her leadership role. When we coordinate the PD events, we attend these five levels of social networking engagement. Detailed information about how PD4IDs was established and how we coordinate the PD events is described in a later section within this article.

Applying CoP and SNKC

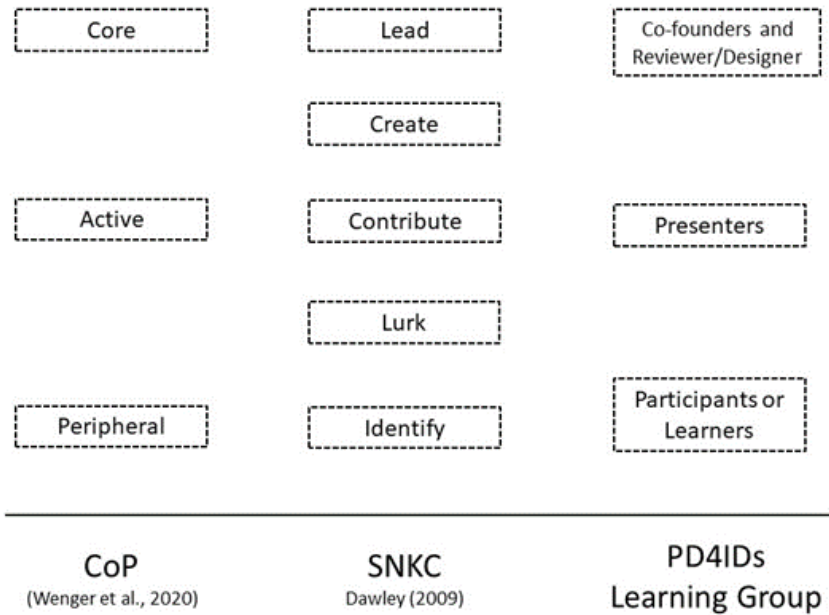
Facilitating free PD events in PD4IDs learning community is aligned with CoP and SNKC. The members of PD4IDs are primarily IDs from various work settings and with different experience backgrounds and levels. They also live in dispersed geographical locations. The free PD events occur annually or bi-annually; each PD event takes place asynchronously in Canvas, a Learning Management System (LMS), to accommodate IDs in various geographical locations and time zones. Additionally, all members are provided with opportunities to connect or network with one another voluntarily. Both CoP and SNKC support such professional learning activities.

Furthermore, the members are welcome to participate at various levels, which is aligned with both CoP and SNKC. In the PD4IDs learning group, there are co-founders and a designer/reviewer, serving as core members, who coordinate the PD events, as well as moderating the ice-breaker discussions. Using SNKC framework perspective, these members are considered as those who usually lead, create, and/or contribute. There are also presenters in the PD4IDs learning group, serving as active members, who share their knowledge, resources, and best practices during a PD event. Resonating with the SNKC framework, these members typically contribute and/or create knowledge. Participants in our learning group serve either as active or peripheral members, who access the course site in Canvas to access the information and sometimes participate in discussions. Aligning with SNKC, members at this participation level may be still lurking or identifying the network. For example, the numbers of our Facebook group members and registrants of PD events are typically higher than those who actively participate in discussions. This is aligned with Marett and Joshi (2009) and Rafaeli et al. (2004) that the majority of CoP membership may consist of “lurkers.”

In addition, during any PD events, all members are welcome to participate at any level, whether they simply provide ideas regarding the topics to learn, register and access the modules, post discussion, or present or facilitate a module. Figure 1 illustrates the participation or engagement levels as we compare CoP, SNKC, and our PD4IDs group.

Figure 1

Comparison of the Participation Levels in CoP, SNKC, and PD4IDs



A visual comparison of participant levels on CoP, SNKC, and PD4IDs

Note. Each element of CoP, SNKC, and MM are listed juxtapositionally according to the participation level. The participation level in CoP (core, active, and peripheral) resonates with the five levels of social engagement in SNKC (lead, create, contribute, lurk, and identify) and also similar to the members' roles in PD4IDs group (co-founders and reviewer/designer, presenters, and participants/learners).

The Coordination of Professional Development Events

How It Started

There were conversations in a Facebook professional group joined by thousands of IDs regarding the challenges of pursuing PD. IDs expressed a need for fulfilling PD without limited by time, location, and budget. They would not mind learning from their colleagues regarding best practices and strategies. Being proactive, three IDs (including Author 3 and Author 1) responded to this need and were willing to lead the efforts.

The Initial Needs Analysis

The three IDs conducted the initial needs analysis, aimed to determine the most requested format or delivery of PD, and the best possible schedule to facilitate the PD by utilizing an anonymous questionnaire. The initial needs analysis is crucial not only to assess what the IDs need, but it is also a way for us to gather people with similar interests and goals in pursuing professional learning opportunities. As stated by Wenger et al. (2002), CoP is a community or group of people with shared interests and goals who gather to learn together. The results of the needs analysis showed that IDs' work setting was diverse, ranging from K-12, higher education, corporate setting, and self-employed. Responses about topic interests were mixed at that early point such as anything related to instructional design, design thinking, ID models, learning analytics, assessment, accessibility, faculty buy-in, portfolio development, and emerging technology.

Survey responses also indicated that the majority of IDs preferred asynchronous format through an LMS and a combination of synchronous and asynchronous formats. Since many IDs also wished for a combination of asynchronous and synchronous formats, there was an idea about including an opening keynote through a synchronous webinar, with a provided recording. Because there was no available budget and no plan to charge event fees, a free version of LMS could be used.

As far as the schedule, survey respondents were not unanimous because they lived in dispersed geographical locations around the world. Therefore, a PD event could asynchronously occur for a week to accommodate all preferred days and times. Additionally, two asynchronous PD events could take place twice each year: one in June or July, and another in December. These months were typically slow and peak

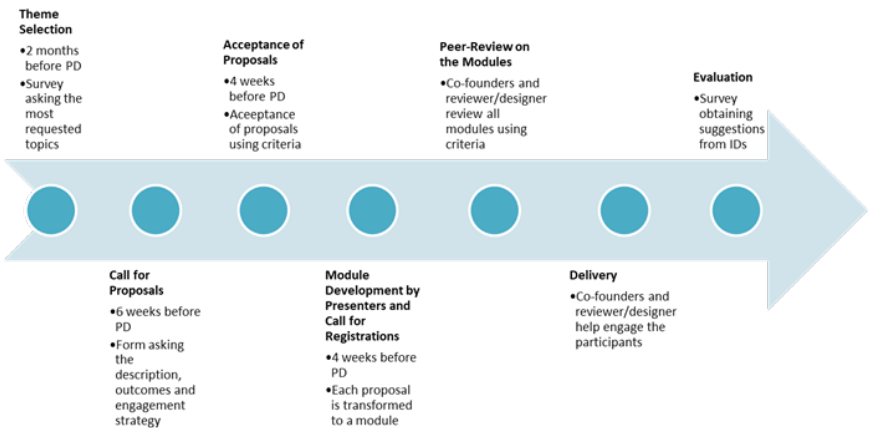
season for instructional designers.

The Formation of PD4IDs Learning Community

The three IDs were then formed as the PD4IDs learning community as a space for IDs who wished to pursue free PD. Referring to themselves as the co-founders of PD4IDs, the three IDs identified the coordination process of each PD event. The process includes the topic selection (two months before the PD event), call for proposal (six weeks before the event) and acceptance of proposals (four weeks before the event), module development by the accepted presenters and call for registrations (four weeks before the event), peer-review of the modules (one to two weeks before the event), implementation, and evaluation during the event. Figure 2 depicts the overall process. Recently, a member joined the core members—this member is now referred to as a designer/reviewer who assists the co-founders in designing logos and images, creating an LMS template, and reviewing proposals and modules. This acceptance of new leaders resonates with both CoP and SNKC; members may adjust their participation at any time (Muljana et al., 2020; Schwier et al., 2014), and they are given an opportunity to participate in a leadership role (Dawley, 2009). Additionally, there is a Facebook group for the PD4IDs members to connect and interact with one another outside the PD events.

Figure 2

The Coordination of Each PD Event



Timeline of Professional Development Events

Topic Selection

Two months before a PD event, an anonymous questionnaire is available for all members to vote for and suggest the learning topics. Questions in the questionnaire revolve around demographic information and requested topics. A questionnaire item lists pre-selected topics based on the needs analysis results, allowing the members to vote on topics and suggest any other topic(s) in an open section within the questionnaire.

We promote the topic-voting call through our Facebook group and additionally share it with several other instructional-design social media groups. Depending on the response, the two or three most-voted topics are selected for the upcoming PD theme. Asking the CoP members to request and select the relevant topics is our way to ensure that the members can perceive the value of learning from the PD events, resonating with Cadiz et al. (2009) as well as Wenger (1998).

Call for Proposals and the Acceptance

Next is announcing the call for proposals. An online form accompanied by a digital poster is posted again on our Facebook group and other groups to invite fellow IDs to share their knowledge and best practices related to the respective topics. Essentially, the call for proposals serves two purposes. First, it is to motivate the members to increase their participation level, in hope of helping them move to level 4 of SNKC (Dawley, 2009). Second, the call for proposal phase assists the core members in promoting the knowledge-sharing activities among members. This resonates with the purpose of facilitating a CoP; one of which is about promoting knowledge sharing (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Once the due date of the call is closed, the co-founders and designer/reviewer review all incoming proposals using selection criteria to select the facilitators or presenters to ensure: (1) the alignment of the title, objectives, and content with the event's topic and (2) clear session description and objectives. Between three to five presenters are usually accepted.

Module Development

Once the presenters are selected (about one month before the event), core members communicate with the presenters regarding the module development. Presenters have approximately three weeks to design and develop the module. Providing a welcoming environment is crucial in a CoP, particularly to establish the learner engagement (Jones et al., 2016). Additionally, knowledge sharing in a CoP may take form in joint discussions and activities (Bond & Lockee, 2018).

Therefore, we developed the module criteria for the presenters to consider as below:

1. the module should take approximately 30 minutes to complete,
2. the opening includes an introduction of the presenter to encourage networking opportunity with the participants,
3. the module contains discussion(s) to promote the engagement throughout the week, and
4. facilitated discussions allow interaction beyond the event, e.g., through e-mails or social media.

At this point, the call for registration and the link to register are available in the Facebook group page. All members can register for the PD.

Peer-Review on the Modules

The co-founders (including Author 3 and Author 1) and reviewer/designer (Author 2) perform peer-review of the modules. As alluded, providing a welcoming learning environment (Jones et al., 2016) and intuitive course navigation is imperative (Preece, 2000), particularly that time may be of essence for the participants (Preece et al., 2004). Therefore, we adapted the questions below from the Quality Matters Continuing Education and Professional Development standards (CPE Rubric, n.d.) for the peer-reviewing the module content:

1. Overview and introduction: Is it clear where to start and find module elements? Did the presenter include a biography? If specific technology is used, are technical requirements included?
2. Learning outcomes: Are the module learning outcomes learner-friendly (brief but transparent)? Are the outcomes reasonably achievable?
3. Instructional materials: Do the materials match the learning outcomes? Do materials cover the topic adequately? Is the content interesting and motivating?
4. Learning activities: Do the learning activities help achieve the learning outcomes? Do learning activities promote engagement? Do learning activities help learners make meaning of the content?
5. Technologies: Do the technologies used to promote the achievement of learning outcomes? Are technologies easy to obtain and use? Do all technologies used function well?
6. Learner support: If learners encounter any issue or have questions while completing the module, do the instructions indicate ways to find help?

Once all modules have been reviewed, the presenters are notified on whether they

need to clarify or add some content to meet with the criteria above.

Implementation and Evaluation of each Event

Each PD event utilizes a centralized LMS account in Canvas. To create a consistent approach to each PD, a template was created. It contains a home page with placeholders for the welcome image, title, dates, and session description. The modules area contains a sample module for the presenters as they work on their modules. When preparing for a new PD event, a new Canvas course site is created as a copy of the template. Then, the modules in the new Canvas course site are repopulated for each presenter, serving as a working-space for their section. Using a template and providing a sample module can ensure the consistent, logical course structure and minimize technical issues (Preece, 2000; Preece et al., 2004).

Although asynchronous, the facilitation of each PD event takes place for one week. The one-week duration is a signal for participants that discussions occurring during that week are monitored. Therefore, co-founders and presenters can set a time every day to read and respond to the discussions. At the end of the one-week duration, we make an evaluation form available, acquiring feedback and suggestions for improving the PD event. The questions included in the evaluation form are related to the overall experience, whether participants would attend again and recommend the PD. Additionally, we ask for any feedback on improvements of future PD, whether they would like to see a different topic, and recommendations on any other better month for hosting a future PD. It is imperative to provide the flexible learning opportunities (Trust et al., 2017), therefore, the modules remain open for on-demand, self-paced PD after the one-week duration. If the self-paced learners want to share insights and discuss, there is a Facebook group for extending the discussion.

Member Reflections

We took the reflective approach to understand “the similarities, differences, and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal” (Goodrick, 2014, p. 1). Such an approach can be used to analyze experiences and challenges that the members may have faced while navigating and conducting informal learning within a CoP-based PD. An example use of the reflective approach is provided by Perrotta and Bohan (2020), wherein they examined their challenges and opportunities of online teaching. Through the reflections of our members, we gain a deeper comprehension of how informal learning in a CoP-based environment shapes their practices of professional learning and instructional design.

Several members with various participation levels, such as a co-founder and a reviewer/designer (we refer to them as Core Member 1 and Core Member 2), a presenter, and a participant, present their reflections. Each of them shared about:

- whether their participation level may have changed at any time while being a member of PD4IDs;
- how participating in one of our PD events, regardless of their participation levels, may have improved their knowledge and expertise, and influence professional practice; and
- any challenges hindering their participation.

The three aspects of reflection listed above are imperative because pursuing PD is essential for improving knowledge and expertise and informing professional practice, as needed by IDs (Sharif & Cho, 2015). Furthermore, CoP members are welcome to participate at any level; but because a CoP function is to help improve the members' knowledge and expertise (Wenger et al., 2002), it is essential to understand how any participation in PD4IDs is helpful for IDs in improving knowledge, expertise, and practice. Last, recognizing their challenges informs us in better facilitating CoP-based PD events.

Core Member 1

As a co-founding member of PD4IDs learning community, I am honored to have the opportunity to share free professional development with others and provide a way for those in the field to gain presentation experience, all without the barrier of cost, time, and travel. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected my workload and ability to be active. However, I always look forward to planning and participating in each PD event.

I am constantly amazed by the variety of experience levels and expertise shared by the presenters within each PD event. I have been able to utilize the examples shared in the PD events in my work. For example, in the 2017 event, the session titled Leveling up, Badges, and Avatars, has provided a way to encourage faculty to design with the learner in mind. By meeting students where they are, they can create an artifact that meets the learning objectives, with a technology that they are most comfortable with. This can range from a paper using Microsoft Word, all the way up to a full video presentation. In the 2019 event, a session titled Learner Journey Maps as a Course Design Tool, has influenced the way I instructor faculty on creating assignments. When creating authentic assessments, faculty may consider the steps needed for each project, from start to finish, and how they may instruct students on the skills needed to complete each step. Not only does this

help to create more thorough instructions, but it considers the learner, who is a novice in the subject, along every part of the journey.

I am now in my fifth year as an instructional designer, and because of this organization, I have the increased confidence that I can perform my job effectively and provide an opportunity for others to learn in the field, without any constraints caused by time or money. I truly respect large professional organizations for providing the resources that they do for our profession, but I also believe that there is a place for smaller organizations who have a passion to share knowledge with others. It has been such a joy to meet so many other IDs in the field who are as passionate about the field as I am.

Core Member 2

I first became aware of PD4IDs as a graduate student while attending a formal professional development conference in 2019. In a session I attended, Author 1 presented her research on PD4IDs and I was immediately attracted to the concept of an accessible community of professional IDs. After looking at the online forum, I contacted Author 1 to discuss opportunities for active contribution to the projects she and the co-founders are working on. I would describe my current participation in PD4IDs events as a designer and reviewer; I mainly work on the design and development of visual elements used in courses and marketing material, as well as reviewing the courses before they are made available to the larger instructional design community.

My participation in PD4IDs has significantly supported my growth as a professional in the instructional design community. Through my work with the co-founders, I had an opportunity to witness how experienced IDs work with presenters, or instructors, in building an online course. I also learned how to use specific features within the LMS that we use for our asynchronous events. Indirectly, the co-founders modeled how to effectively collaborate with other IDs on a shared goal. In the online forum, I often read external articles that were shared by other IDs in the group. Most of the posts that I engaged with in the forum were individuals sharing information about other free professional development opportunities, job openings, and discussions on technology selection. For most discussions, I would consider myself a lurker who reads what other people are saying or sharing. I find reading the discussions to be beneficial, especially to read about the thoughts of experienced professionals, who bring a lot of work experience to the conversation. In PD4IDs specifically, I have not shared any articles or initiated any discussions myself, although I do create and share content on other networking platforms, such as LinkedIn.

Connecting with my co-founders, who all live in different states, has helped build my confidence in reaching out to others in the instructional design community to talk to them about trends in instructional design or their areas of expertise. I have also become quick to share what I am learning with both IDs in my department and the larger instructional design community, through one-on-one conversations, blog posts, and social media.

Presenter

Mother Theresa said that “we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful” and I wholeheartedly agree. To be a teacher, an instructor, to think about the students and their development, to be interested in eLearning trends— this is the first step. But, we can only grow to be exceptional IDs if we work together, collaborate, and exchange our knowledge. Even after 10 years of experience, I still believe it is essential for me to learn from others. Therefore, I am always looking for ways to expand my professional horizons, and PD4IDs was one of them and a pretty damn good one.

In my eyes, for an experience of that sort to be successful, three main elements need to be fulfilled: the event needs to be eclectic so that I can meet other points of view; it needs to feature a variety of topics so that I can be exposed to ideas I have not come across before; and last but not least it should need my attention so that it can “tell me and I remember,” as Benjamin Franklin said. PD4IDs puts attention on all. However, what proved to be the most satisfying, was the tactile experience of engagement throughout the event, and after it as well.

As a presenter, I was not passive during the event; oftentimes, such events only require creating or recording a talk and adding slides, but nothing more. At PD4IDs, I was responsible for inputting the content into the LMS, managing it, and inciting and curating a healthy debate about the subject—and it allowed me to look at how I prepare my talk, how I share it, and how I interact with the listeners. The responsibility to lead a discussion turned my focus from “done the deed” into “I can shape young minds and re-invent my own.” As a result, I carry it with me that my talk extends far beyond the time allocated to the presentation, it (hopefully) follows other people to their jobs, it transfers to business circles and discussion groups, and it can make or break someone’s thinking.

Of course, this feature was also available to me when I was the listener. I could engage in a healthy debate with other interested participants and exchange my thoughts for their ideas. I had the ability to confront my views, change my mind, and adjust my thinking on the basis of other IDs’ brains attending the event.

Participant

Due to time constraints, I was not able to participate in on-site or in-person professional development. I was participating in a few online learning forums on Facebook and LinkedIn, but I wanted a more robust learning experience. I found the PD4IDs group on Facebook and joined right away. I was instantly energized by the plethora of ideas, topics, and discussions that happen in this group. There was even a free asynchronous professional development that I attended that helped me stay up to date on current topics and trends.

About a year later, I landed my first full-time instructional design position. It was a significant move and required a great deal of courage. Having had the support of my colleagues from the informal instructional design groups, including from the PD4IDs group, I felt more confident. Posts and discussions by these colleagues in social media and the informal learning opportunities have an important role in my professional learning. While working on the day-to-day instructional design projects, I did not mind asking questions and seeking ideas from other colleagues.

As I continued to grow in my career, I sought out new employment opportunities. Our PD4IDs group posted a job opportunity in my geographic location at a public university with an innovative, creative, progressive instructional design team. I applied right away and got the job! I am very grateful to be in this PD4IDs group and have the support of my colleagues for professional growth and their backing when I needed to move on to a new position.

There are challenges in online groups, and the PD4IDs group was not an exception. There may be a communication barrier from the lack of being in a face-to-face environment. If someone posts something sarcastic or disrespectful, it is easy to assume that it is intentional. As a result, I am cautious about commenting on other members' posts. When I post a comment, I make sure that I wrote something rather general but encouraging. Since the field of instructional design is so vast and varied, it is critical to stay on topic and within one's sphere of expertise.

I have continued to stay connected with the PD4IDs group and found that some of my new colleagues at my current ID position knew people in our PD4IDs group even though we lived in different geographic locations. Since that time, I continue to grow by reading research articles and posts, participating in free professional development opportunities from the PD4IDs group. I am not alone in this new endeavor. I have a whole group of collective minds that inspire me, support me, and push me to be my very best.

Discussion

In this application paper, we initially present the needs for IDs to continually pursue professional learning. The paper additionally includes the relevant conceptual framework, how we facilitate free PD events within the PD4IDs learning community by following the conceptual framework, and the reflections of several members. The reflections are overall congruent with existing literature and conceptual framework. We discuss this alignment in several key points: (1) participation change; (2) improvement on knowledge and influence on practice; and (3) challenges of participating in online CoP-based PD.

Participation Change

The CoP-based PD events coordinated within the PD4IDs learning group are coordinated to promote knowledge sharing and informal learning through social interactions and motivate members to participate in various levels. The members' reflections show that they start by identifying the learning community they would like to join. Then, their participation levels change from time to time. As seen in Participant's reflection, she purposely looked for a learning community and found PD4IDs. She then initiated her participation as a peripheral member by enrolling in the PD events but rarely contributing to the discussions during the PD and in Facebook. This resonates with Lave and Wenger (1991), learning in a CoP may begin with legitimate peripheral participation. Participating passively in the beginning allows the new members to get the sense about the community and observe how other members interact (Dawley, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991). As she became more comfortable interacting in the CoP environment, she then started to ask questions and contributed responses to the discussions during PD and in Facebook, resonating with Lai and Chen's (2014) study and Dawley's (2009) levels of social network engagement.

As Core Member 2 shared, she found the PD4IDs learning community through a conference presentation. Similarly, Presenter indicated that she was initially looking for ways to expand her professional horizons and found PD4IDs. This experience, once again, resonates with Dawley's (2009) SNKC framework. Additionally, it is aligned with Guldberg and MacKness' (2009) study presenting that the participation levels in a CoP group may shift from time to time. An active member like Core Member 2 helps the coordination of the PD events by reviewing proposals and modules, as well as designing course elements. However, at another time, she is sometimes a "lurker," plainly reading the discussions and Facebook posts. Regardless of her varied participation levels, she seems to perceive the learning value. Therefore, she tends to share the information gained from PD4IDs

back to her workplace and other instructional design communities through casual conversations, blog posts, and social media. Despite the members' participation changes, this suggests that PD4IDs serves as a CoP to its members, not plainly a community of interest or social group. According to Cadiz et al. (2009), if CoP members no longer perceive the learning value anymore, the main purpose of CoP will diminish, and the community will not be different than a social group. Therefore, it is imperative to support the learning experiences of all members, regardless of their participation levels and changes.

Improvement on Knowledge and Influence on Practice

IDs perceive the need to continuously improve knowledge, skills, and attitude related to the instructional design process (Sharif & Cho, 2015). As expected, the reflections also present the stories about how these members were looking for just-in-time learning opportunities. A core member typically serves by coordinating the joint activities, facilitating discussions, addressing any questions and requests from the members (Borzillo et al., 2011; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). However, even as a PD4IDs group leader, Core Member 1 values the resources shared by other members and uses them in her practices. She has been able to integrate the examples shared by others into her work and further share them with the faculty members she collaborates with. This reflection suggests that her experience in PD4IDs may have shaped her professional learning and design practice.

As an active member, Presenter also values the learning opportunities gained through engaging others in a meaningful dialogue about her modules, thereby sometimes resulting in an adjustment of her own perspective. These reflections are similar to an experience of language teachers discussed in Dale's (2013) study; CoP-based PD can provide like-minded professionals opportunities to share tips and experiences, and critically think about their own practice while interacting with others, potentially resulting in knowledge and practice improvements (Dale, 2013). Additionally, information learned from a learning community like PD4IDs group may allow the members to contribute to the collective learning by resharing it with others who are not members of PD4IDs, as told by Core Member 2. This indicates a potential influence of a CoP-based PD and group in shaping the knowledge building in the broader community.

Challenges

Two of the members, Core Member 1 and Participant, highlighted challenges with conducting informal professional learning and interacting with others online. One

challenge is finding the time to participate, parallel with Preece et al.'s (2004) finding. Peripheral members prefer to stay in this role as they may not have time to participate more actively. Participating in an online CoP addresses members' time constraint because CoP groups embrace all participation levels. However, the coordination should be well-planned, and therefore it may take time of the core members, as Core Member 1 mentioned.

Another challenge revolves around maintaining netiquette in online forums. This aligns with Carpenter and Harvey's (2019) study; disagreements in a deep discussion may happen and spark defensive and offensive reactions. Therefore, there are concerns among members regarding shaming and disrespectful behaviors (Dabbagh et al., 2015; Krutka et al., 2019). As Participant pointed out, this type of behavior may occur online unintentionally. Therefore, members may want to think carefully before posting and be cautious when commenting.

Implications and Conclusion

This paper offers implications for IDs searching for ways to engage in professional learning and improve their knowledge and practice. CoP groups like PD4IDs may be appealing to IDs for seeking timely information and resources as the need arises. When IDs search for a suitable CoP, especially those facilitated through social media, they may consider using Dawley's (2009) five levels of social engagement. IDs may initially identify which CoP appropriately addresses their professional learning needs (Dawley, 2009). Then, they may observe the existing members' actions and discussion (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As they feel more comfortable with other members, they may gradually share stories and experiences to offer insights to others.

CoP groups embrace all members with any participation level; therefore, IDs can adjust their participation according to their availability (Schwier et al., 2014). Peripheral participation (i.e., lurking) may not be a negative behavior because the less-active members can be goal-driven and strategic in managing their participation (Romero-Hall et al., 2020). Furthermore, a CoP group like PD4IDs also serves as a knowledge repository where members, including peripheral members, can visit previous modules or posts to find specific information or resources as needed. As these members have more availability, they may decide to be more active by volunteering in the joint activities. Additionally, as a core member has mentioned a similar time constraint while coordinating CoP activities, it is essential to open the volunteering opportunities to other members. This opportunity can promote a sense of belonging to the community and sustain the learning value within the CoP (Eaton & Pasquini, 2020).

IDs should continually improve their knowledge, skills, and attitude related to the instructional design process to keep up with the field and job demands (Sharif & Cho, 2015). Pursuing professional learning informally supports IDs' effort to stay abreast on trends, issues, and job demands because it is not restricted by a particular curriculum and time (Richter et al., 2011). Additionally, CoP-based learning opportunities, such as those offered by PD4IDs, can further address geographical and funding limitations. This application paper presents the coordination of CoP-based PD events hosted by PD4IDs by following relevant conceptual frameworks and the reflections of several members from PD4IDs. The reflections indicate the benefits of participating in a CoP for shaping IDs' professional learning and practices. As online CoP groups are becoming ubiquitous, this paper informs (a) IDs in regard to selecting an appropriate CoP and deciding on one's participation level, (b) working professionals with supervisory roles regarding the benefits of and importance of supporting non-traditional PD, (c) working professionals from other fields regarding ideas to pursue informal learning opportunities to address immediate professional learning needs, and (d) extends the literature related to informal learning and CoP on the practical aspect.

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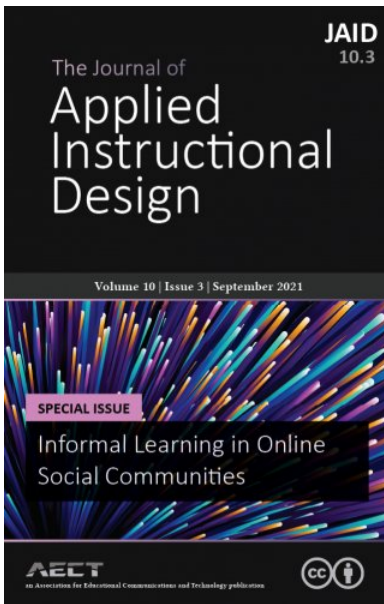
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