Assessment 3: Design of an Online Community

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Background

As Maker Education gains a stronghold in current pedagogy, many online resources have appeared. There are plenty of articles, websites, and some online communities that have developed over the past several years. As a leader in educational technology who is passionate about Maker Education, I see myself as a technology steward (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009). With a felt-need to contribute to the betterment of the Maker community, I see the need for an online community specifically for K-12 educators. To achieve this goal, I created a website that provides features that support an online community: K12 Makers: A Community for Educators https://geekygoggles.wixsite.com/k12makers

K12 Makers is an online community that provides K-12 educators a place to find and contribute to best practices in Maker Education. Kraut and Resnick (2011) suggest "carving out a useful niche" (p.231) when creating an online community. K12 Makers will serve and attract members specifically in K-12 education who are interested in Maker Education. While this community could serve all Makers, this is a large group who work in different sectors and may approach their mission for Making differently. People who are involved in Maker Education and the larger Maker Movement may be in higher education, museums, libraries, or commercial Makerspaces, all with different goals.

Design Decisions

Through the use of forums and a blog, K12 Makers will provide teachers the ability to share ideas and support each other since many educators in K-12 are often thinking of planning lessons, meeting standards, and reaching a spread of students with many different skill levels. Shaffer and Anundsen (as cited in Paloff & Pratt, 2007) remind us that communities emerge "when a group of people share common practices" (p. 27). Teachers engage in this type of

community sharing in and out of the workplace when surrounded by people who have the same

domain and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In an online setting, when members of a

community engage in conversation that is personal to them, it will increase bonds-based

commitment (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). This type of commitment occurs when members become

committed to the group. They create connections to individuals in the community, which is a

motivating factor that can help members in the community feel the desire to participate. Not

only do members get to talk about topics they are passionate about and practice, but they will

also build relationships. An online community allows for relationships to be made with

members, peers, influencers, and even potential mentors who might help a community founder or

other members to learn and grow (Mack Web Solutions, n.d.). To participate in the forums or

blog, community members will need to subscribe and become actual members of K12 Makers

website. K12 Makers members can see each other's About page, learn about the person, see how

many posts, comments, and likes they've made, all of which supports another of Kraut and

Resnick's design claims for bonds-based commitment (2011).

      The founder or administrator with their team can work to get the community off the

ground but will need participation and contribution to keep the community going. Reaching out

to individual members with personal social contact may cause members of the community to

contribute more (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). Through asking questions, making suggestions, and

personally asking people to participate, the community will grow and thrive. Other members

will start to post in the blog or forum, ask questions, and hopefully get answers from peers.

      Another feature of this community will be the sharing of events at which members can

get together outside of the online community and actually meet face-to-face. There are many

different Maker-related and educational technology conferences members can plan to attend or

even design their own events and meetups, which can contribute to needs-based commitment to the community; the attachment to an online community based on the perceived net benefits everyone experiences (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). Event information will be shared with members in a forum setting.

In order for the community to grow, an effort in acquiring members will be necessary. The use of and maintenance of social media will be key in obtaining new members and even friends of members. Social media maintenance will be done by the entire foundational team, and eventually passed on as tasks to other regularly contributing members. It may be useful to link to other social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Twitter, which can be seen linked to each page of the online community site. These links aren't active, however they show the intent to gain membership from social media. In addition to recruiting members from social networks, Kraut and Resnick (2011) also suggest strategies such as active recruiting, word-of-mouth recruiting, and making it possible for active members to share content with others easily. In the case of educators, it would be wise to recruit more members through targeting schools and specific academic disciplines. This would also ensure the community recruits the right type of newcomers.

Another important online community responsibility is managing behavior. Kraut and Resnick (2011) suggest many ways to regulate behavior in online communities, and very early on the site administrators should establish a clear set of rules and guidelines. This will help members be aware of the expectations while using the online community. In addition to rules, community founders will need to monitor content and comments coming from members. The Wix website builder allows for the site creator to have control over who can contribute to the forums and blog. For example, the blog can be set to allow everyone to be able to view it, just

password holders, or only members. The site administrators can also give permissions to

members who can create new forums or posts instead of just comment. Finally, the site allows

the administrators to set spam and filtered words that will either not allow the post to be

published or replace the flagged words with asterisks, respectively. As a community grows and

thrives, behavior management will need to be reassessed as necessary.

Comparison to Other Online Communities

The K12 Makers community is unique in that it is aimed at educators and allows for

members to contribute to the content. Currently, there is only one online community website,

Makershare.com which is similar to how K12 Makers functions. MakerShare, open to Makers of

all kinds, allows members to post projects, create portfolios, and connect with other members,

but lacks an emphasis on education. There are also several online communities related to

Making, some of which are based on teaching but exist in the format of Facebook groups and

pages. Not being entirely familiar with how these groups might work, I'm unsure how

permissions would work in managing content from other members. The Wix website K12

Makers uses seems to simplify and support the process of creating a successful online

community. Most other Maker Education websites are the author(s) sharing content with no

opportunity for membership and contribution by others.

Conclusion

K12 Makers provides a purposeful online venue for a community of teacher makers to

convene and share their practice in a welcoming environment governed by a clear set of rules

and guidelines. The site makes use of social media, forums, and a blog as ways for educators to

share their ideas and ask questions. Through this technology, membership and collaboration can

occur which ultimately create new relationships and may help retain committed members longer.

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