
Hospitable facilitation of learning communities

Abstract

Learning Communities require expert facilitation so that everyone collaborates and learns equitably while designing a collective response to challenges across disciplines and organizations. Hospitable facilitation could be developed as an appropriate skill to encourage transdisciplinary, collaborative learning. The proposed session introduces a reflection tool inspired by the concept of intended equitable hospitality (IEH) to generate a conversation among lecturers. This conversation will help them identify valuable interventions to support equitable and hospitable learning spaces.

Key Words: learning community, intended equitable hospitality

Theme: Teaching practices

Kind of submission: Idea Pitch for Lecturer's Lounge

Introduction

There is ample evidence that learning communities are a suitable environment for inter- and transdisciplinary learning, while providing a connecting space for the development of ideas between stakeholders involved in the complex challenge that the community works on. (Vermaak, 2025). Learning communities are designed to support formal and informal learning trajectories. They are rooted in the educational discourse frame of knowledge as inter-objectivity: knowing is embodied in doing, and embedded in a constant, ever-unfolding choreography of co-action (www.learningdiscourses.com). In a learning community, learners are considered to be interactive participants, while teachers are facilitators, mentoring and empowering participants to address the issue. Learning communities are co-designed by participants who agree to create a “trusted space for rich conversations about practice” (Wilson & Lowe, 2019). Expert facilitation is a key condition for successful learning of participants (Schipper et al., 2021; Visscher-Voerman et al., 2024). Facilitators have a key role in convening network partners, designing a program of activities, facilitating collaborative exchange, and monitoring learning outcomes at individual and team levels.

In a recent exploration of two interdisciplinary learning communities by the author, it was noted that although conscious collaboration was recognized by participants as a key condition for successful learning, facilitating collaboration posed a challenge. Over the duration of the community, one semester, facilitators needed to create and maintain a safe and welcoming space where participants felt free to step out of their comfort zone, connect with new people from different disciplines and different practices, negotiate boundaries, and honestly reflect on individual and shared experiences. Facilitating the experience of interdisciplinary collaboration, where participants are essentially dealing with strangers in an unfamiliar environment, resembles the work of a host who familiarizes guests with a new space.

Theory

Hospitable facilitation was taken as a starting point to explore the skills set for a facilitator of learning communities. Hospitality can be understood as a reciprocal relationship, which is historically and morally rooted in dealing with strangers, who might be turned into friends (Lashley, 2015). This notion

of hospitality as a way to integrate strangers into a community is consolidated by the concept of intentionally equitable hospitality, IEH (Bali & Zamora, 2022), a guide to managing equitable interchange in a formal learning environment. IEH draws attention to the positionality of teachers with regards to their role in the community: they are invited to consider equity, inclusion and belonging in this particular space hosted by them. Teachers can practice IEH by ensuring psychological safety, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to contribute and by distributing agency to participants. Also, facilitators should make room for spontaneous informal exchange, storytelling and empathy, to enable guest-participants to connect around issues that are meaningful to the community at that moment in time.

Proposed Activity in Lecturer's Lounge

The workshop engages participants in a conversation, guided by a reflection card set, based on IEH principles. This card set will be used to engage attendees in discovering effective attitudes and repertoire of facilitators, intent on hosting communities of equitable learning [499 words].

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