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EDTC 816 Advance Methods for Building Online Communities
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Assessment 1: Online Community Search

Participate Learning- <http://www.participate.com>

Participate Learning is an online community designed to offer collaboration and learning opportunities for educators. With free and paid membership options the user is presented with an a la carte menu offering curated collections of resources searchable by category, grade level and standard. Bringing together global users contributing perspectives that recognize the connective power of shared learning. Users from all levels of the educational field, administrators, teachers, support staff, and students over age 13 participate through authenticate Twitter chats, optional classes, Google +, and Facebook communities. The ever growing membership which began in 2013 now numbers 1,488,000 members in 1,483,695 communities.

The founders of Participate seek to provide an avenue to equality and results for students and educators. Providing a means to gather and manage quality digital resources, which can be shared, mixed and discussed in collaboration with other community members seeking resources for best practices. Selecting membership in the Participate community can serve as a gateway to time saving practices maximizing the potential learning for its users. The easy search menu paired with the personalization aspects with the ability to gather and maintain curated resources exemplifies the simplicity and ease of use that busy educators today require.

Apple Teacher - <https://appleteacher.apple.com/>

The Apple Teacher learning center provides access to educators seeking to become knowledgeable in the use of Apple products for student learning and engagement. Selecting from three different course options, iPad, Mac, or both, users can earn badges to acknowledge their level of mastery. Seeking to build collaboration between its community of empowered users promotes members to become active on the weekly Twitter following @AppleEdu, using the #AppleTeacher. The goal of preparing educators utilizing best practices to enrich students learning experiences is obtained by emersion into the Apple Teacher community. Upon signing up, you gain access to lessons, stories detailing personal experiences, and a resource web page available for user exploration.

This community which formed early September 2016, has no published information on the current number of members. The site while heavy in self-promotion offers those interested in Apple products a means to collective work beyond the beginners' level to become masters of the tools for personal and professional growth. Supporting the process, badges can be earned along the journey to becoming a recognized Apple Teacher. Membership and recognition in the community offer the benefit of providing training that can ultimately prepare you to take the leap to the next stage of becoming an Apple Distinguished Educator.

Community Criteria

Reflecting on the similarities of the Personalize Learning and Apple Teacher communities, the first concept that struck me was the search for individuals with common interest. Personalize and Apple utilized the need that educators have to seek others who have similar goals to build the bases for each of their communities. Keeping membership free, they offer a place where access is under the control of the user. With opportunities to seek and share knowledge on a shared topic that is information deemed relevant to others.

The second concept that stood out was the ability of the user to design and control their level of interaction. While the option is available within both communities for full emersion, members can control the pace and depth at which they involve themselves in the process. While the Personalize learning community provides access to multiple connective opportunities, Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. How you access, and share is dependent upon your drive and level of commitment to the community.

Apple Teacher on the other hand, has developed a Twitter following with regularly scheduled weekly chats. Working independently to gain the foundational skills, members meet on Twitter to discuss and share ideas on the best practices surrounding implementation of the skills mastered. Through share experiences and trial and error results, the membership can build resources that they share with each other.

The third commonly shared aspect of both communities is the sharing and curating of resources. Personalize and Apple both provide member dashboards where information in multiple formats, videos, apps, websites, blogs, and or articles can be curated for the member to add to their toolbox. The free exchange of information that helps to enrich the knowledge basis of others is a key concept in the online community realm. Participate, in my opinion offers a better designed than Apple currently.

The fourth aspect that the communities share is the availability of global reach. Participate has membership that is international. Apple Teacher while in its infancy is currently being piloted in the US only. Apple with the worldwide use of its line of products will be expanding the Apple Teacher community in the near future. The ability to learn from educators around the world expands the member's community in ways that face to face learning opportunities were unable to accomplish for the majority of educators.

The criteria based on my observations for forming an online community are the ability to gain participants who share a common interest. The ability to provide a means to develop, learn, and share information between the membership. The means to gather and maintain resources in a centralized placed. The quality of information and reach of membership must be reflective of the goals of the community in order for the community to grow and sustains its overall purpose of enriching the opportunities for learning of its members.