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IN-2-THEORY – Interprofessional theory, scholarship and collaboration: A community of practice

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SHORT REPORT FOR SPECIAL EDITION

IN-2-THEORY: Interprofessional theory, scholarship and collaboration: A community of practice

ABSTRACT

Theoretical awareness is essential in the development and delivery of effective interprofessional education and collaborative practice. The objective of this paper is to explain the origins and purpose of an international network, *IN-2-THEORY: interprofessional theory, scholarship and collaboration*, a community of practice (CoP) that aims to build theoretical rigour in interprofessional education and collaborative practice. It explains why the network is viewed as a CoP and lays out the way forward for the community based on the principles for developing a CoP outlined by Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002).

Introduction

Adequate theorisation is required for the development and delivery of effective interprofessional education and collaborative practice (IPECP) (Barr, Koppel, Reeves, Hammick, & Freeth, 2005). The centrality of theory to IPECP is explored elsewhere in this Special Edition (Hean & Reeves, 2013). The objective of this paper is to explain the origins and purpose of an international network, *IN-2-THEORY: interprofessional theory, scholarship and collaboration*, a community of practice (CoP) that aims to build theoretical rigour in IPECP. It explains why the network is viewed as a CoP and lays out the way forward based on the principles for developing CoPs outlined by Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002). It provides concrete ways in which each principle is being implemented to strengthen our theoretical practices and the productivity that arises from working and learning together in this fashion.

Background

IN-2-THEORY developed from a series of workshops funded by the UK Economics and Social Research Council (2007-2009). This brought together theory-interested individuals within the IPECP field to work together raising the profile of theory within interprofessional research, policy and collaborative practice (Hean, Hammick, Miers, Barr, et al., 2009). The workshops developed strong working relationships with international colleagues, relationships which led to the development of the IN-2-THEORY community.

The purpose of IN-2-THEORY as a community of practice

A CoP comprises “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006). The CoP domain is the common interest, expertise, practice that

brings the community together and differentiates it from other communities. (Wenger et al., 2002, Wenger, 2006)
Our domain is a shared interest and expertise in theory, a desire to improve theoretical awareness and rigour and hence the quality of curriculum development, research and collaborative practice.

Becoming a member

As a CoP, IN-2-THEORY comprises individuals whose passion is theory in IPECP with a central philosophy that members learn with and from each other. It is a COP in which international and national collaborative projects and learning about theory are encouraged. It brings together expertise from educators, professionals and researchers from health/social care, education and psycho-social disciplines and countries such as South Africa, USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Iran, Turkey, Singapore and Malaysia in a forum to debate, share, and develop theory and its applications. People become members by joining our facegroup pages (<http://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/369496843106395/>) and participating in discussion there. Alternatively they send an email to the corresponding author requesting to be added to group emailing lists where information of meetings, group activity and requests for collaboration are circulated.

Mapping the way forward

The IN-2-THEORY community holds to seven principles of developing a CoP (Wenger et al., 2002): design for evolution; open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives; invite different levels of participation; develop both public and private community spaces; focus on value; combine familiarity and excitement; create a rhythm for the community. Table 1 describes the translation of each principle into IN-2-THEORY practice and our plans for the future. In summary, the development of a CoP is an evolutionary process and the actual programme of our work over the next two to five years cannot and should not be predicted or orchestrated. However, it is for the core convening group to put structures in place that will facilitate but not direct the community's growth and responsiveness to the IPECP environment. These structures are detailed in Table 1 that include regular meetings at conferences, participation in social media discussions, webinars and regular evaluation of the outputs/progress of the network members each year to demonstrate the community's value. We focus on working together to build relationships and learn from each other. By practicing in this way we develop shared repertoire of resources (e.g. a range of theoretical frameworks of relevance to IPECP), experiences, stories, tools (e.g., ways of testing theory, reviewing and evaluation techniques) and ways of addressing recurring problems (e.g. defining theory, bridging the gap between theory and practice)-in short, a shared practice (Wenger , 2002, 2006).

TABLE 1 HERE

Conclusion

Over the last two years members of IN-2-THEORY have published together on theoretical issues, submitted research proposals and delivered workshops on the use of theory in curriculum development. We are currently engaged in a scoping review of theory and are collaborating with colleagues in the data collection phases of an international research study. These collaborations are gaining impetus and membership is growing. Activities have developed the relationships required to collaborate better in the future and we learn together of different theories and how these may be applied. We invite readers to engage and learn with us at a level of your choice, with the central aim of enhancing theory in IPECP and the evidence base that supports it.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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Table 1: The principles of a Community of Practice as applied to the In-2-Theory network

PRINCIPLE	IN-2-THEORY APPLICATION
Design for evolution	IN-2-THEORY's development is an evolutionary process and theories, projects and collaborations develop and fade as members engage and disengage. We do not therefore propose a preconceived programme or area of practice that IN-2-THEORY should follow. For this evolutionary, organic process to continue, it is essential that members know about each other's interests and take time to interact and share them. We therefore encourage members to share their own theoretical papers and those of others on our facebook group pages and at face to face meetings of the community.
Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives	Our facebook group pages, e- mailing lists and face to face meetings are set up to open dialogue between members (insiders). We are building external dialogues with wider IPECP networks such as the Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education (CAIPE), the European Interprofessional network (EIPEN) and the Global Research Interprofessional Network (GRIN). Future efforts will focus on organisations such as the American Interprofessional Health Collaborative (AIHC) and Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative (CIHC). These organisations are encouraged to join discussions with IN-2-THEORY on strengthening the theoretical rigour of their practice and disseminating the work of the community.
Invite different levels of participation	Three levels of participation are possible in the IN-2-THEORY CoP: as a member of the core convening group, as active participating members or on the periphery watching developments. All levels are acceptable and learning can occur in any of the three levels. Mechanisms whereby movement between core, active and peripheral participation can occur are needed. Active participation is encouraged but not forced; we believe in "building benches on the sidelines" for members to sit and watch until they are confident to move to the centre and more take active roles within the group (Wenger et al., 2002).
Develop both public and private community spaces	IN-2-THEORY must develop both public and private community spaces that strengthen individual relationships. We envision future activities in which break away groups will work together on specific theory related activity alongside public group-wide events. Public events will take the form of open access webinars, meetings and teleconferences for general information exchange; private events will take the form of special interest groups or bespoke project bids where communication is through email and invited seminars.
Focus on value	The value of community membership must be explicit to members. The social capital generated through participation has led individuals making connections to networks to which some members had links, but others not (e.g. connections to CAIPE, Association for Medical Educators in Europe-AMEE, Japanese Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education-JAIBE). We have drawn on the skills of others, researchers gaining insight into curriculum development, faculty development and health care policy and the educators being introduced to theories from disciplines outside education. The CoP has increased out productivity and we reduced our research and practice isolation as individuals interested in IPECP and as theorists within this field. A regular update and reflection of members' activities will be undertaken annually by the convening group to monitor the

	value of the community's collaborative practice.
Combine familiarity and excitement and creating a rhythm for the community	IN-2- THEORY needs to develop a rhythm, a series of meetings that combine familiarity and excitement. These meetings offer members a safe place to discuss, learn and fail if need be whilst simultaneously offering cutting edge discussion and technology in exciting places to maintain the enthusiasm around using good theory to underpin IPECP. Regular meetings for the whole community take place at conferences commonly attended by members such as those hosted by the Association of Medical Educators in Europe (AMEE), EIPEN, Altogether Better Health (ATBH) and Crossing Boundaries (CAB).

