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Designing Effective Online Communities: Google Classroom Google+ Community

Introduction with Summary of Organization's Strategies

The unofficial Google Classroom Google+ Community is open for anyone in the public to join. Its primary audience is educators that have begun using the application that Google rolled out to schools that use Google Apps for Education last year. In addition, the moderators of the community have also created a Google Classroom Experts page on Google+ that is associated with the Google Classroom Google+ Community.

The community's mission is to enable a place for members of the school community to discuss how Google Classroom is being used throughout schools throughout Google Apps for Education's service area, which includes schools within and outside the United States of America. The community guidelines also make mention of two specific communities, Google Apps in Education and Google Apps for Education hosted on Google+.

About this	community	
Invite people	Share this community	
	thing relating to Google (your experiences.	Classroom! Post your resources. Ask your
😽 Google Class	room Help	
Community (Guidelines	
🔇 Google Class	room FAQ - Product For	ım
🛃 Google Class	room Help Center	

There are currently eight moderators, who have been invited to help lead the discussion platform at different points this past year. Moreover, the site, though not officially sponsored by Google, has the official Google Classroom Product Manager, Jennifer Holland as one of its moderators. She is the only moderator that is an official Google employee. Some of the other members, such as Michael Fricano, II are Google for Education certified trainers. The creator of the site is Kurt Paccio, the technology director from the Northampton School District in Pennsylvania. Another moderator, Ziggy Dziegman, is a student who uses Google Classroom. Classroom is a platform for teachers and students to share assignments, posts, documents and other relevant educational-related materials. The organization has developed a strong following and they see the growth continue to grow at an exponential rate. The main intent of the community is for individuals to post questions about Classroom, Google's new learning or working management application, according to Michael Fricano, II (Interview Fricano, 2015). The community has put forth a set of guidelines (Appendix A) that encourage the sharing knowledge, links to relevant information, such as articles, photos and tutorials (Google Classroom Community Guidelines, 2014). One of the "unwritten" goals but one that comes from the community is the ability for responses to questions to be posted in a timely fashion. This makes it more than just a full asynchronous community. Users are encouraged to sign-up for notifications, where they can receive updates to posts through their Gmail accounts.

In addition, they ask for a posts to be a few sentences in length, as post. They discourage any form of advertising or spam and such material will be removed by one of the moderators. The community works with Google's product support team and encourages individuals to take part in usability studies with Google. In addition, they often refer back to the official request for feedback from Google's Official Support team that can be done only while on Google Classroom. There is also a Google Group support page that is run by Google where people can find answers to questions and they are answered by official employees from Google.

Goals of Online Community and Interview with Michael Fricano, II See Appendix B for Interview Transcript

How to build effective online communities is difficult work and does not necessarily have to use the latest digital tools for success (Kraut and Resnick, 2011). The context and purpose of a community can exist and meet its end goal through the use of older technology tools, such as a phone and discussion board. The Google Classroom Google+ Community has had great success since it began. Per the Classroom Guidelines page (source), here are some relevant statistics:



Community Created - June 2014 New Moderator - +Michael Fricano II - September 23, 2014 10,000 Members - November 18, 2014 New Moderators - +Jen Holland, +Susan Herder, +Jason Schmidt, +Khondker Md Shah -Al-Mamun - January 16, 2015 17,789 Members- February 21, 2015

According to Wenger et al. (2009), a technology steward is an individual that can help set an appropriate tone and help steer a community in the right direction. This would include building partnerships with its members. Those that are passionate, rather than receiving monetary compensation, may also be effective stewards as the main goal is to develop an effective community. One such "technology steward" that was interviewed on Thursday, February 20, 2015, was Michael Fricano II, who became the third moderator of the community three months after it began. The transcript of the interview can be found in Appendix B, Interview with Michael Fricano II (Interview with Fricano, 2015. Mr. Fricano initiated the live Video Conference via Google Hangouts. Our group was able to secure the interview through a request to the moderators through a Google+ quote to the eight moderators and Mr. Fricano responded. Mr. Fricano explained that "it has become a place for any teacher to go and get answers" and "it has become the "official" community for Google+ users" thought he was clear to make sure that it is not a community that Google started. When asked who started it, he said "he wasn't sure." From reading the guidelines, Mr. Fricano was the third moderator and we found that Kurt Paccio was the original owner. We tried to contact him via his school and through Google+ but he has not responded.

Per online communities, often people have developed relationships but they do not know one another through personal, face-to-face contact. Mr. Fricano met with us for thirty minutes though a face-to-face video conference. He indicated that the moderators work closely with the Google Product Classroom Team, and particularly with the product manager, Jennifer Holland, who became a moderator well after Mr. Fricano did. He indicated a variety of factors that have led to the skyrocketing growth of the community. First. Google Classroom is a very popular and widely-used application and began full roll-out to schools in September. We asked him if he thought that the growth of the numbers would slow down once people become more familiar with the product. He thought they would continue to grow, as individuals begin to use Classroom on a daily basis and then go to this community for answers. Other learning or working management systems per his definition have holdouts who have not yet made the transition from platforms such as Moodle or Schoology to name a few.

Moreover, he said that if you post a question, there will typically be posts to it within five minutes. He said that communities does not keep metrics for how many total posts they have and he does not have this information as a moderator. The owner of the community may have these metrics. He did say there were about 10 new discussion posts started each day with responses to each one. It can be safe to say that there are well over 5,000 posts unique to this Classroom. Individuals often share links for tutorials on how to complete items.



When asked how he became a moderator, Michael indicated that he posted responses and answers to questions on a consistent, almost daily basis. He was then asked to help moderate the community and this is indicated by a special icon next to his name in short, threaded discussion posts. He is also a Google for Education Certified Trainer and his current employment is a technology integration specialist in a Hawaiian public school. He believes that the first instinct is for people to go to this community before going to Google's official support page for the community. As a moderator, he recommends people to give feedback to the development team while on the Classroom application itself. He pointed to the location for it within this community. Michael indicated that the moderators have set a Google Experts Classroom page, which our team is now following. He indicated that top-contributors can be asked to become experts; the rising stars of the forum. On a final note, he indicated that the new mobile apps for Android and IOS devices has made Classroom and the community even more involved in promoting the tool.

The expert team encourage individuals contribute valuable information to the community which aligns with the opportunity for a more meaningful experience within a community. (Kraut and Resnick, 2011; The Truly Monumental Guide to Building Online Communities, 2013; Wenger et al., 2009). A community cannot always have everyone be full participants at all times. However, one that is growing and evolving could have one member recommend one members speak with other members who may be an expert on a topic that was brought up in a forum. The divergence of new technologies, in this case two video interviews, has been an effective part of their community and they have not overlooked this form of interaction when developing their online community (Kraut and Resnick, 2011).

Google Hangout with Google Classroom + Community Moderators

See Appendix C for Interview Transcript (Hangout with Google Classroom Community Experts, 2015)

Google Classroom advertised a live discussion forum for members to learn the features of Google Classroom and ask questions. The Google Classroom Community Experts Hangout (2015) entitled, We Love Our Users- A Google Classroom Hangout on Air, was posted a week prior to the live hangout by Fred Delvental. There were approximately 23 viewers attended. Our group includes two of the 23 attendees.

According to Wenger et al. (2009) learning together happens in a group when members can share experiences. Prior to the hangout, members were given the opportunity to submit questions for the classroom experts to view prior to the hangout. The following was submitted electronically through the question form that was provided;

Hello Google Classroom Experts,

We are doctoral candidates enrolled in an educational technology program and we would like to ask you questions regarding building effective online communities for an assignment. We are very impressed by your community and thank you in advance if you could answer some of these questions during the live Hangout.

- 1. What does the Classroom Community entails? Provide most-used features please.
- 2. What are you seeking to accomplish through your online community.
- 3. What actions or steps have you taken to accomplish your goals?
- 4. Has your community made any progress and if so how or what tools do you use to justify it.
- 5. What steps are made to recruit members?
- 6. How many people are considered administrators for the community and what roles do each play?
- 7. How do you keep the community engaged?
- 8. Have you ever had any issues in terms of turnaround time?
- 9. Do you offer surveys or have any mechanism in place to receive customer feedback?

Each classroom expert introduced. Jen, a Google Classroom expert welcomed everyone feedback upon completion of the session. Jen informed the members when using Google

Classroom, teacher becomes the coach when implementing instruction. She further explained how she and the program was designed to work on what people cared about. The questions submitted were addressed and answered. Jen also would do a follow up by emailing the member to get a better understanding of the member's question. She later learned the question what was posed and answer would also show on Twitter. She would in return offer more information and do another follow with the member who raised the question. Google Classroom.

One part of the Classroom application that people have found very useful is the ability to record lessons, videos and even have live Hangouts, where a student who is at home can participate if they are absent from the physical class setting. This feature enables users to participate remotely.

Middleton (2012) suggests when members feels a part of a community, it leads to increased loyalty and the membership will increase by recommendations from others. Jen also explained the purpose of the Feedback Button. If you want to reach out to the moderator, the Feedback Button would alert the moderator. She also asked if anyone was interested in being part of the usability team should reach out to the team members. To expand the community, Google Classroom also reach out to it members asking are there any specific features they would like for the classroom to offer. Jen asked if the members to send something they would like to have as a Highlight which would be considered best practices. She said they would not use the word Highlight and they would choose the wording to capture their Highlight event.

Michael Fricano, II, Google Classroom Expert who is a teacher of a private K-12 school in Hawaii added Google Classroom is a great way for students to get involved and ask questions. Google Classrooms is for educators, teachers, and students. The Help Check button goal is functionality and productivity, meaning the purpose is to walk members through on how to set up a class. The experts are involved to create open forums where teachers can ask questions and communicate with other educators. Google Classroom open forum is a great resource for teacher to help one another and share lessons. The Google Classroom is also accessible on Twitter.

Metrics for Goal- Customer Satisfaction

Kraut and Resnick (2011) offer that communities have different levels of engagement. The community moderators continue to explore many different means to help build and develop the community. It was odd that Mr. Fricano did not know who the owner of the community was after he was asked to moderate it? However, perhaps this is just the nature of many online communities, where people never meet one another face-to-face. Perhaps, he was asked to be a moderator by the second moderator. It also appears that the owner of the community, Kurt Paccio, is much less active than other moderators. Does that mean it is not effective and what measurements or metrics are they using?

The consistent, daily posts by members and the positive feedback that is displayed on the sites shows that this is a productive community. In our group, we have personally asked questions to get answers back very quickly, as indicated by the moderators. The other piece of information that was very informative was the moderators continued reference to the Send Feedback that can only be accessed while on the application. This Send Feedback is a gateway directly to Google engineers and product team members. There are certain key terms also to put into this feedback area to get the attention of the product manager, Jennifer Holland. Some of

them include +Usability Reports Interest +Interested in Volunteering and direct reference to any specific items. The Community team prides itself in its rapid growth since June of 2014. The place is active and one that members can participate.

The community wrestles with its "unofficial" forum title and I am not sure why Google does not recognize this as the official site, as there are many more users on this than on the Google Support page for Classroom. However, "learning together is a resource for practicing in separate contexts" and this community, whether it moves to and from the Experts page or the feedback section on the app page does a nice job in helping its members learn and improve the product (Wenger et al., 2009).

Conclusion: Successful? Recommendations Going Forward

From the information we gathered through two live video interviews, interfacing with the application on a daily basis and interacting with the community, the community has achieved great success since it began. The forum is an easy place to navigate and post questions (Kraut and Resnick, 2011). It is a great place to go and get a question answered. There are many knowledgeable educators on the forum who have like-minded goals in using the application and finding ways to improve it. Suggestions can be made on the Google Classroom Community. Particularly impressive is the rapid growth in eight months of use to almost 20,000 members. The entry to the community is easy and a participant can offer quick suggestions and feedback. It fits the needs of educators, who are constrained with great time-demands when teaching days are in session. The quick ability to respond, answer and get feedback meets the demands of educators. Below is an example of a post, where you can see the response were all from the same day.



All communities can have methods for improvement. The inability to provide a suggestion that the Google Product team would see from the community was not intuitive. Classroom Community and Google have developed a partnership with one employee from Google, but I wonder if there could be a better way for the forum to have a more clearly-defined relationship. Also, the response from moderators when trying to get interviews, though we accomplished it, was met with a modicum of success. That is, one out of eight agreed to a one-on-one interview. By good fortune, we were also able to ask questions through an online forum through a pre-planned Hangout that the community was going to have for its members. This was good-timing for us, but it was not of a one-to-one nature. The experts are knowledgeable not only in the technical field but also knowledgeable in content area skills suitable for K-12 educators. The experts also care for the needs of the members to assist accommodations for their needs.

Going forward, the community can find a better way to educate its members on searching for information. If either of us were to strive to become moderators, we could but it would take ample posting every day. That gets back to the question of resistance to participation and possibly over-participation, just for the sake of posting. That doesn't seem very natural. As of now, the community flows nicely but a page of the top ten requests could be an outline that comes at the top. Also, users should be encouraged to search for past posts. Overall, the members and moderators are trying to make the community successful. It is one that our group will continue to explore and be active participants in going forward.

References

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Hangout with Michael Fricano, II, Jennifer Holland, Google Classroom Product Manager and Ziggy Dziegman: Google Classroom Community Experts [Group Hangout Interview]. (2015, 2). Recording at <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=tLo2TO1n_I</u>

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Appendices

Appendix A- Google Classroom Community Guidelines

Last Revised: Aug. 18, 2014.

Google Classroom Community Guidelines

Welcome! Thanks for your interest in our community. We deeply appreciate that you're taking the time to read and review our moderating guidelines. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact our moderators: <u>+Kurt</u> <u>Paccio</u>, <u>+Ziggy Dziegman</u>, <u>+Michael Fricano II</u>, +Jen Holland, +Susan Herder, +Jason Schmidt, +Khondker Md Shah -Al-Mamun.

Please Note: Our community is an <u>unofficial</u> Google Classroom community. We are not affiliated with, or endorsed by, Google Inc. The <u>official support site</u> and <u>official support community</u> can be found online. We are volunteers and not Google employees.

Community Mission

The mission of the Google Classroom Google+ Community is to provide a central platform for discussion of Google Classroom and it's use in our schools. Additionally, we recognize the importance of the wider community, and actively embrace other communities like <u>Google Apps in Education</u> and <u>Google Apps for Education</u>.

Content Sharing Policy

Sharing articles, tutorials, photos, and other third-party content is a large part of what makes the Internet a great resource. The Google Classroom community embraces that ideology, with a few strict limitations to make sure the content being shared contributes in a positive way to the community.

- Common sense rules apply, do not violate the Google+ Terms of Service.
- Among other topics, sex, religion, politics, racism, and hate are always considered to be off-topic.
- You may share articles / content you've produced, but these cannot be the *only* content you share. They also must be relevant to the community's interests.
- When sharing a link, your post <u>must</u> contain a few sentences as well. "Bare links" are classified as spam, and may be removed.
- When sharing photos, your post <u>must</u> contain a few sentences as well. "Bare photos" are classified as spam, and may be removed. Memes and image macros are frowned upon, and should generally be avoided.
- Any obvious advertising of a brand, product, or service without true relevance to Chrome is subject to removal.
- Links that, when clicked, automatically initiate a download will not be tolerated. Please make sure you are linking to a landing page.
- When sharing content, it would be appreciated if you search for an earlier post first, to avoid duplicate postings.

On Referral / Affiliate Links:

Appendix A- Google Classroom Community Guidelines

These are links that when clicked or used, earn the poster money or free services. In general, our preference is that these types of links are not shared. However, we do allow them when the following conditions are met:

- All FTC .com Disclosure Guidelines must be met. (Link .pdf)
- Your post must include a "clean" link (a direct link to the product) as well, in a visible placement.
- Your post must state how you are rewarded when your link is used ("I earn money" // "I get free storage")
- These posts are never to be made frequently (multiple per day is never tolerated), nor as your only contribution to the community.
- Note: Please remember that because our formal preference is that these links not be shared, we will always be more strict when the above conditions are not met.

Expected User Behavior

Our target age demographics include all web users. This means that all content in our community must be appropriate for that audience at all times. Many of our members are students looking for information about a schoolissued laptop, for example. Additionally, we make an effort to present a welcoming aura, and as a result, personal attacks are never acceptable.

- All content (posts, comments, photos, events) must be appropriate for all web users. This means <u>no</u> <u>profanity</u>.
- Criticism must always be constructive in nature.
- Discussion of competing products and companies should be polite, informed, and contribute positively to the community. A post simply dismissing or criticizing other products and companies, without useful commentary that sparks meaningful discussion, may be removed as spam.
- Please refrain from using "text speak", or other shorthand when posting. An example would be "when u tlk like dis". Additionally, proper spelling and grammar is always appreciated.

Community Milestones

- Community Created June 2014
- 2000 Members Sunday, August 17, 2014
- New Moderator +Ziggy Dziegman August 18, 2014
- New Moderator +Michael Fricano II September 23, 2014
- 5000 Members September 25, 2014
- 10,000 Members November 18, 2014
- New Moderators +Jen Holland, +Susan Herder, +Jason Schmidt, +Khondker Md Shah -Al-Mamun January 16, 2015
- 15,000 Members January 20, 2015

Special thanks to the <u>Chromebooks</u> Google+ community for allowing us to borrow from their community guidelines.

Appendix B: Michael Fricano II, Google Classroom Community Google+ Moderator Interview Questions: Interview 1- Michael Fricano (live video hangout with one-on-one questions that were asked for approximately 30 minutes). Summary of notes from February 21, 2015.

1. What is the organization seeking to accomplish through their online community?

- for the google classroom, it has become a place for really teacher to go to Google Classroom to go there; even it is considered the official... it has become the official community and if you are on Google+
- work with the product manager of the Google Product classroom team.. the person Jen Holland is the product manage and is one of the moderators now for the classroom
- a group of people that have tried to gather to beef up on classroom.. a handful of offered to moderate this community;
- part of this Jen..google plus page is the experts page... for Google classroom-..tomorrow's hangout is going to include that page... intern for Dan...
- feedback loop and how people... mainly send feedback through classroom.
- handful avenues..

Interactions: first instinct is to go to a community and a forum to a group of people who have faced the issue; first option and the community is 18000... get an answer in the first 5 minutes...

about 10 new posts a day...

co-teachers: Jen might address that might be in development.. it's a feature that is more difficult to create...

When started? time announced....

official way is to provide send feedback... google page... ? in right corner...

if people share a feature that you can click on the question mark... you always share ...

2. What actions (page 3) have they taken towards accomplishing these goals? not going to slow down anytime soon the more the app evolves... the more it will seem to some people are not holding out; (schoology, moodle) classroom will become a much stronger learning management system... could be used in higher education...

3. What measure (metrics) do they employ to understand their progress towards these goals? customer satisfaction,
10 posts a day about average...
on average 10 or 15 people

DEPENDS upon how involved you are; active multiple times a day; mobile devices and accessing and respond and participate... because I am a Google Education Trainer.. allowed me to education trainer... met one on one..people who have questions..

5 minutes

with every Google App, Google Classroom Forum and you go to the question and access the forum. A program called the top-contributor program... and participate in the discussions and forms are labeled those people as rising stars... forms... experts as people that share ...

customer satisfaction, external participant numbers and activity, posts from Google classroom expert page... He was gracious and indicated that our group would go the live 3-person moderated-hangout tomorrow.. Appendix C. Google Classroom Hangout Session with Moderators- Jen Holland, Google Classroom Product Manager- Google Employee, Michael Fricano, II, Ziggy Dziegman



Google Classroom Experts Shared publicly - Feb 8, 2015

#GoogleClassroom

Google Classroom loves its users. From the teachers and aids in the classroom, to the students who use it daily for their work, to the administrators and IT professionals that keep the school running, you all make a difference in the world today and in the future. Classroom is being built to make education easier, and Read more (12 lines)



concept of assignment has shifted.

a great tool for flipping the classroom

using it for a blended learning model

easy to have discussions with it...

Juile- Chicago Public School- creativity has increased and attached it to assignment

read a passage

students love the feedback they have on writing

makes it easy to manage the writing process..

turn in the assignment and then release it the next day..

many features ... hold on they can't edit it until its release backed to them...

send feedback button always gets in front of our team

work on things that people want to work on...do remote hangouts to better understand what they want..

interested in providing usability studies... want to be part of team to try and provide feedback for people use..

When? Why? ... when things are coming....never commit to timelines... being flexible and focus on the users...

don't want to promise a date and figure out which are the most important features people are requesting...

-- send feedback is important versus forum

-send feedback: best practice

-- feedback in the forum as a user; hey that's a great idea and to see why they are going to use it...

-- the forum is a great to do a how to...

anybody can answer the questions in the classroom or use classroom themselves..

there is quite a handful of those ...

probably get an answer in 5 minutes...

love that students to get involved around the world and have a tech club

there is a space for students to come and ask questions...

-- couple of questions how drive/docs work

- Classroom is a nice interface that you can do with docs.. and such

top user education: understanding between student and teacher role

can use it for sharing announcements... administration

I chose students over teachers; admin console

Google classroom groups of business...

confusion over creating assignment; options you have.. add a new attachment and have you make a copy.. have the assignment make a copy for each student...

co-teaching classroom- adds to simplicity; co-teaching want to do it right.. Send Feedback.. Calendar Integration Not yet...be specific for calendar... help center exists... how to create a class, go to forums and search for what you are looking for search for the answer first... don't search for the answer first Experiencing issues and then send feedback... class URL and screenshot Classroom Experts Team: basically divides efforts into two main areas First- like that page Always looking for using Google Apps for Education Help others spread their knowledge and not to see scary.. Not an LMS- Welcome anyone that #Google Classroom Google for Education page has 6 lessons for Google Classroom

Jen Holland-

The teacher becomes the coach Welcome every bit of feedback Work on what people care about Follow up on people and talk to people to get a better understanding Request more feedback from users They get back to them through email Jen notice email feedback appears up on Twitter Feedback Button Purposes Best way to reach moderator If you want to be a part of our team Let us know if this is something you want If you want to participate Send us something you want to highlight which is best practices We not use the words Best Practices, leave it up to us and we will choose the wording Highlight captures success Michael fricano II Great way for students to get involved and ask questions. Google Classroom is for educators, teachers, students, Jen- Some people may ask if the feedback button is functional Goal is functionality and productivity- make sure they the features function right Encourage people Understand what people want Usability Help Check will walk you through How to create a class Got to search How can classroom experts get involved Provide link on hot to be an expert Help other teachers **Open Forum** Follow Google Classroom on Twitter **Training Centers**

Appendix D: Classroom Photos

Example of Google Classroom Application







