

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the conclusion of the THESA Inquiry Project 2014/2015. The support of THESA's Community of Practice, (CoP) in the realm of the increasing variety of social media technology was the focus of the inquiry. A strong, connected membership in THESA is critical to navigate the current political environment of educational reform. There is a concern for the seemingly decrease in member involvement in THESA. What is the function of social media in a CoP? What are the best methods for connecting and supporting our membership?

THESA strives to find ways to connect and engage the Home Economics teacher in many ways. THESA currently provides its members with opportunities to connect using Facebook, Ning, website, Pinterest, Twitter, conferences, newsletters, webinars, and a recently reinstated listserve. The inquiry chose to study the use of these in other CoP's and survey Home Economics teachers in the province of BC, (members and non-members) as to their use and their current needs.

Inquiry Group Members

Susan Armstrong	THESA Membership Chair	Mission
Madeline Wong	THESA member	Surrey
Judia Pelech	THESA member	Surrey
Lorraine Pepper	THESA member	Cranbrook
Joanne Lee	THESA member	Coquitlam
Martina Seo	THESA member	West Vancouver
Jenny Garrels	BCTF Facilitator	BCTF

INTRODUCTION

Our inquiry question was defined after discussions on issues currently affecting Home Economics in BC. THESA continually strives to embrace new technologies to connect, engage and support Home Economics teachers in BC. What is the purpose of using these technologies? What are the most effective methods? What is most useful for our membership? How can we encourage/promote membership in THESA? There are many teachers teaching Home Economics courses who do not have the educational background. How can we support and involve these teachers? How can we support all Home Economics teachers with teaching resources, in order that our courses continue to be a valued and relevant in BC school curriculum.

To understand our question, we needed to address:

- a. what is the purpose of our CoP
- b. who is in our CoP; what are their needs, and preferences
- c. how do we best fulfill these needs?

How can we develop a community of practice to support/promote Home Economics teachers in BC?

The process to researching our question involved the steps:

- A. Researching Professional Learning Communities & Communities of Practice
- B. Data Collection
 - a. Survey:
 - 1. BCTF Professional Specialist Associations
 - 2. THESA members
 - 3. non- THESA members who teach Home Economics
- C. Data Analysis of survey results
- D. Recommendations

A. RESEARCHING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

What is the purpose of our CoP?

Research showed that successful CoP's provides its community with systems to:

- a. consume through accessing resources
 - b. connect by providing ways to communicate with other members
 - c. create by using some of the ideas provided by others in their own practice
 - d. provide members ways to contribute ideas to the community
- (LaGarde & Whitehead, "Power UP"; Knowledge Quest; Vol.41, No.2, 2012)

How do we connect and encourage participation in THESA? We use a variety of social media, but seem to have a small number engage. Where is the balance between being open to the general public for public relations and education but having some of our activities closed for "members only" to encourage membership. What are the reasons for deciding to join THESA? We need to focus on what we are providing teachers with as well as the method in which we provide it.

"The most effective networks are sparked by an authentic need. Maybe it's the hunt for new ideas, the desire to feel connected to others who are facing the same challenges, support for a project, data to help advocate for a program, or just the need to fill the vacuum or not having like-minded educators at arm's reach. Either way, many educators can trace the spark that began their PLNs to an initial quest for information, a hand reached out for support, or a plea for help in solving a real and immediate problem." LaGarde, Jennifer and Whitehead, Tiffany

We need to understand our membership in order to deliver the support that they desire. A recent contentious issue posted on our newly reinstated listserv, illustrated the desire to connect with other Home Economics teachers and the passion our community feels for our subjects, but also identified that many do not wish for the overwhelming volume of messages that flooded their inboxes. There are also “lurkers”. Many new members of CoP’s prefer to lurk. They quietly follow the information provided, without participating in the social discourse. This may be the natural first step in connecting more actively in the CoP.

“One of the wonderful things about social networks is that they provide the participant with a seemingly endless stream of new information. On the other hand, one of the most daunting things about a social media tool is that they provide the participant with a seemingly endless stream of new information.” LaGarde, Jennifer and Whitehead, Tiffany

B. Data Collection

Building on a previous survey that went out to THESA members via an email in the spring of 2014, we mailed out a request to all BC middle and high schools to request teachers of Home Economics to complete a similar survey. For non-THESA members, we wanted to find out where they currently found information regarding Home Economics curriculum and resources, as well as their interest in hearing from THESA and what were the barriers to becoming a THESA member. Twenty-three Non-THESA members responded.

Current members were asked to respond on issues regarding the preferred methods of communication, motivation for being a THESA member, and how THESA could provide professional support. Forty-five THESA members responded

The current communication practice of other PSA’s was requested and 8 PSA’s responded giving a variety of methods used. The question of whether their communication activities were open or closed to non-members ranged from all open, all closed or a mixture of both. There seemed to be a feeling that twitter and email blasts were the most effective for communicating with members.

Of the following social media options:

- 8/8 used Twitter
- 8/8 used a listserv
- 7/8 had a website
- 5/8 used Facebook
- 5/8 had a newsletter
- 5/8 had a journal

C. Data Analysis

A. THESA members

Q1: Rank order preference for current communication methods used by THESA.

When asked to rank order preference for current communication methods, the top three were Listserve, Newsletter and Facebook. Written comments and suggestions about the different methods included:

: use one platform as a primary source of communication; too saturated with different methods

: check Facebook daily, but rarely think to check Ning

: US based Family and Consumer Sciences facebook page has huge traffic and great ideas

: prefer things that “come to them” (email notifications) versus having to go to look at a site

Q2: What other methods of communication would be useful to you?

Drop box and Google Docs were the top two methods, however a few respondents were not familiar with any of the terms.

Q3: Why are you a member of THESA?

The top reason was to network with other teachers, followed closely with finding classroom resources and keeping up with current issues. One interesting comment was that THESA is more relevant to high school teaching, and not useful for middle school.

Q4: How can THESA support professional development?

Nearly half of the respondents chose conferences as their number one choice. Regional conferences were second in choice and comments noted that it was difficult to come to Vancouver, when living in other parts of the province other than the lower mainland. Written comments pointed out the importance of the newsletters to regions where attending a conference is difficult. Other comments suggested regional conferences or EdCamps for interior or northern communities. Others liked being able to ask questions as they came up on a listserv, as being more useful than regularly having resources available or sent.

Q5: What resources would be useful to you?

All the resources were suggested as useful with unit/lesson plans, Power Point/Prezzi and website links being the top three. In an era of tight budgets, most school educational media is woefully outdated, so links to useful YouTube clips would be useful and free!

B. Non-THESA members

Q1: *Where do you find information on curriculum & future of applied skills courses?*

1. google/internet
2. colleagues
3. ministry

Q2: *Where do you find information re: lesson plans, resources, etc for use in Home Economics classrooms, in rank order.*

1. google/internet
2. colleagues
3. social media

Q3: *Where do you find information on further studies and professional development opportunities related to Home Economics?*

BCTF was the most common source and then a small number answered they found information from colleagues, private courses in the community, university or district Pro D.

Q4: *Are you interested in being included in online discussions with other Home Economics teachers on topics of interest to the profession?* 5 out of 46 did not .

Q5: *Even though you are not a THESA member, are you interested in hearing from THESA on matters of provincial significance?* 82.6% indicated yes.

Q6: *Have you heard about THESA before?* 3 out of 46 had not heard of THESA

Q7: *Barriers to becoming a THESA member:*

- : cost of membership
- : Ning cumbersome; having to go check in on it; prefer listserv
- : requiring BCTF number is cumbersome
- : busy developing curriculum
- : joined but never got anything?
- : too many other teaching areas
- : too many emails

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Three main functions of THESA in supporting and encouraging membership are:

Function	Examples	Suggested method
Communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues in curriculum • Ask questions of other teachers • Network 	Listserve Edcamp or conference
Share resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit/lesson plans • Course outlines • YouTube links • Website links • Powerpoint/Prezzi • Resource list – lessons - equipment 	Facebook OR website OR Teach BC OR Google Doc's *listserv-notification of postings
Network		Conference Edcamps other regions Listserve Promote local THESA chapters

2. Provide more support for teachers:

- In middle schools
- In using social media in the classroom
- Investigate use and promotion of Teach BC by adding more Home Economics resources to the site and promoting it to Home Economics teachers. Teach BC is a web based platform for lesson plans, newly launched by the BCTF. As the format is easy to access and free to use, this may be an answer to collecting an archive of lessons for THESA. Is this something THESA could easily use or would members be reluctant to try something new?
- Web based, single location, resource base in the following categories: lesson plans, recipes, powerpoints or similar presentations, equipment sources, projects, YouTube clips, useful website links.

3. Limit the communication platforms that THESA uses, but allow some public access to encourage membership and for public relations. The issue of what should be open to “members only” is a discussion for the THESA executive. Where is the

balance between supporting and improving instruction in all Home Economics classrooms in BC and encouraging membership.

Members Only	Open to all Home Economics teachers
Listserve (fully interactive)	Facebook (fully interactive)
Website – newsletter, access to scholarship applications	Website – lobbying, conference info., scholarship information only
Newsletter	

Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger and communities of practice

<http://infed.org/mobi/jean-lave-etienne-wenger-and-communities-of-practice/>

Communities of practice a brief introduction, *Etienne Wenger*

<http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/06-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf>

Collaborative Teacher Inquiry. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat Special Edition #16: Collaborative Teacher Inquiry. Ontario Ministry of Education.

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/CBS_Collaborative_Teacher_Inquiry.pdf

Edublogs Teacher Challenges. <http://teacherchallenge.edublogs.org/pln-challenge-1-what-the-heck-is-a-pln/>

LaGarde, Jennifer and Whitehead, Tiffany. Power UP Your Professional Learning. Knowledge Quest. Volume 41: November/December 2012

Hoadley, Christopher. What is a Community of Practice and How Can We Support It?

<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/006/677/CHAP12HOADLEY.pdf>