eLSID Engage!

Building a Community of Practice

A report on the pilot of a new professional development program. Program design, implementation, data collection, analysis, and documentation by Lodge McCammon.

Summary

I created a professional development program called "eLSID Engage!", with the aim being to further enhance the growing Wake Tech Community of Practice. Working with four faculty members, I was able to offer three unique professional development sessions, twice over two weeks. The response to these sessions was overwhelmingly positive, with the vast majority of participants from these six sessions (n=108) indicating they were *very likely* to adopt the featured teaching strategies. Given the positive feedback and requests for additional topics to be included, I recommend integrating the eLSID Engage! program into the larger Community of Practice efforts managed by the eLSID Team.

Background

The eLearning Support and Instructional Design (eLSID) Team at Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech) is working to build a Community of Practice for faculty. We are acting as a bridge to connect faculty across departments and campuses to facilitate peer-to-peer learning. We know from research that when teachers decide to make a change to their practice, they are most likely to turn to their peers for guidance. We want to design professional development experiences where we are making peer learning accessible, while amplifying faculty voices in order to spread innovative teaching strategies. A Community of Practice can promote rapid and sustainable change.

Our Community of Practice process, at a glance:

1. Identify faculty members who are using innovative and scalable practices.
2. Interview those faculty members and create short video overviews of their innovative practices.
3. Push out the videos to the rest of the faculty to promote these "Featured Faculty" members and their practices.

I was interested in building on this existing Community of Practice work by adding an additional step to our process:

4. Offer live sessions that feature these innovative faculty members so other faculty can connect, discuss, and learn more.

This document outlines the process and results of a pilot I created where six such live sessions (called "eLSID Engage!") were offered to faculty over a two-week period in Fall 2020.

Establishing the Program

The idea for creating a live professional development (PD) program was borne out of a need for a structured space for faculty to share and spread the most current innovative teaching practices.

Many of our 1000+ instructors are using smart and practical methods to enhance the student experience. The goal of eLSID Engage! is to amplify their voices and scale their ideas.

Contacting Featured Faculty

For the initial pilot, I opted to work with faculty members who had previously been interviewed and for whom a short video had been created as part of the eLSID Team's work in establishing a Community of Practice. I sent the following email to four faculty members (two of whom had co-presented a topic) and asked if they would be willing to participate in a live PD session as Featured Faculty, which would focus on them and their teaching strategies.

> SUBJECT: eLSID Engage!
>
> BODY: I wanted to pitch you an idea. I am planning to host a PD series for Wake Tech faculty where they can connect with and hear from our most innovative faculty members (you!). Thus, I was hoping you might help me host a session on [*listed their topic*].
>
> Here is a rough agenda for an hour PD session (using Teams) that features this idea. I would handle all the logistics, promotion, and facilitation of the session. Your role would consist of being in the Teams meeting for the hour, sharing a story or two at the beginning about your courses, looking over and commenting on ideas shared by your peers (the participants) during the hands-on time, and answering questions at the end.
>
> I know that your time is valuable and that you are extremely busy. However, I feel like these sessions will amplify your work and help inspire other instructors to integrate new strategies in their courses. That said, is this something you would be willing to partner with me to offer? My goal would be to offer a session in the next few weeks.

All four faculty members responded positively, saying they would be interested in participating. In fact, all of them were enthusiastic about being asked to share their work with their colleagues through a live PD session. Their participation meant we would have three unique topics for our PD sessions. Each topic was offered twice over two weeks, for a total of six possible PD sessions.

Promoting the Pilot

After aligning with the Featured Faculty on potential dates and times for their participation in the live PD sessions, we emailed the entire faculty at Wake Tech, informing them of the upcoming sessions. The sessions were listed in GoSignMeUp, the college's tool for managing professional development enrollment. Each session was scheduled for an hour and worth 1 credit toward the college's professional development requirements. The following email was sent to faculty:

> SUBJECT: New PD Featuring Faculty
>
> BODY: Hosted by Lodge McCammon, eLSID Engage! is a series of live (on Teams) PD sessions that feature Wake Tech faculty who are using smart and practical methods to enhance the student experience. During these engaging 1-hour virtual meetings you will hear from innovative instructors, participate in hands-on activities, discuss new strategies, and ask questions.

Upcoming Sessions...

Creating a Course Orientation w/ John Etheridge & Patrick Williams

John Etheridge and Patrick Williams designed an interactive orientation to prepare Wake Tech students for online learning. 93% of students who completed it went on to complete the course. Want to learn more? Select a session below.

Tuesday 9/22 2:00-3:00pm [link]

Wednesday 9/30 2:00-3:00pm [link]

Integrating Student Surveys w/ Beth Keeley

Beth Keeley embeds a survey at the end of each week in her online course. This allows her to gather feedback from students about what is confusing and what is working well. She uses the resulting data to enhance her courses. Want to learn more? Select a session below.

Wednesday 9/23 10:00-11:00am [link]

Thursday 10/1 1:00-2:00pm [link]

Introduction to Screencasting w/ Meghan McIntyre

Meghan McIntyre wants her Wake Tech students to feel like they have a real, engaged teacher in their online classes. So, she uses a simple screen recorder to quickly create and share video content. Want to learn more? Select a session below.

Thursday 9/24 8:00-9:00am [link]

Tuesday 9/29 12:30-1:30pm [link]

This initial communication generated some interest and yielded approximately 85 registrations (Note: Faculty could register for more than one session.). With this starting list of PD participants, I created a Microsoft Teams meeting for each 1-hour session, sending an invitation to all registrants. This triggered an automatic meeting invitation, adding the PD session to their calendars. In the meeting description, I added, "We're looking forward to seeing you soon!"

Increasing Registration

To increase registration in this initial pilot, I reached out to those who had already registered for a PD session approximately one week before their scheduled event. I sent these registrants an overview of the session(s) they had registered to attend, asking them to forward the email to their colleagues, encouraging them to sign up as well. The email below provides an example of what the registered faculty received. As a result, registration increased approximately 20%.

SUBJECT: eLSID Engage!

BODY: Thank you for signing up for an eLSID Engage! session. I have added you to the Teams meeting and we look forward to seeing you soon!

In the meantime, please help us spread the word. Forward this email to colleagues and ask them to join you. Anyone can sign up using the link below.

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Note: The section below was included only in the second week, leveraging participant feedback from the first week.

Here's what faculty are saying about eLSID Engage!

"This session was very engaging. I liked the part where we had time to work independently."

"It was very short and focused on one small course improvement that could be easily implemented."

"Even though it wasn't necessarily the focus of the session, I feel that I picked up a few ways to run synchronous sessions better!"

"Direct. Useful. No fluff."

Increasing Session Attendance

It was possible that some faculty would not end up attending the event for which they registered. To encourage session attendance, I sent a reminder email to everyone who had registered for a given session approximately one hour prior to the event start time. I did this to make sure they remembered, to let them know that we were excited about meeting with them, and to give registrants an easy way to access the session. The email included a direct link to the Teams meeting for the session.

SUBJECT: eLSID Engage! Reminder

BODY: Greetings!

Just a quick reminder about today's session at [time]. We have added the meeting to your Teams calendar; however, you can also access the meeting directly by selecting the link below.

Join Microsoft Teams Meeting [link].

Professional Development Format

All eLSID Engage! sessions were structured as follows:

1. **Introduction Music / Testimonials.** Five minutes before the session, music (jazz/classical) music was played to establish a connection and signal that the session was live. While the music was playing, eLSID Engage! testimonials appeared on the screen, communicating to participants what others have thought about the sessions thus far. (Note: Testimonials were included only during the second week of sessions, after initial data had been collected.)

2. **Introduction Video.** The session kicked off with a two-minute, pre-recorded video that provided an overview of the session and gave participants their first assignment: introduce yourself in the chat and share some good news. This video also showed participants where they could find the session agenda (an example can be found here) and resources.

3. **Some Good News.** After the overview video, I introduced the Featured Faculty for the session and asked them to share some good news. After they shared, I read and commented on the good news shared by the participants through the chat.

4. **Discuss Introduction Strategies.** I briefly talked about the reason I used music to kick off a session (i.e., it can focus attendees and set the tone). Then I took a flash poll where participants "raised their hands" (done virtually; a tool in Teams) to indicate agreement, asking who might be interested in using a pre-recorded video themselves to kick off a lesson or synchronous session (typically, more than 75% of participants indicated they were interested in this idea). Finally, I asked the Featured Faculty to share their thoughts on why it might be a good idea to kick off a class or lesson by sharing some good news (they typically talked about how it sets a positive tone).

5. **Mindfulness.** I asked participants to join me in one additional introduction activity. I talked briefly about why we might use mindfulness/meditation exercises with our students and then practiced one with the group. After it was over, I held another flash poll, having participants raise their hands if this was something they might be interested in trying with their students (approximately 50% of participants, across sessions, indicated they were interested in experimenting with this strategy).

6. **Community of Practice.** I briefly talked about how eLSID is working to build a community of practice by identifying innovative faculty members and amplifying their voices through the creation of "mico-documentaries" and hosting these eLSID Engage! live PD sessions. I also told the story of how I met the Featured Faculty member(s) in the given session.

7. **Faculty Innovation Video.** I played the micro-documentary that was created for the Featured Faculty, which was a short video that provided an overview of the innovative strategy the faculty member(s) used. (Note: We didn't have a micro-documentary for the student surveys session so I played a screencast overview video that was created by the Featured Faculty).

8. **Hear from Featured Faculty.** The Featured Faculty spent 5-10 minutes talking more about their innovative strategy. During this time, they shared student feedback, tips on how to avoid common pitfalls, additional details about the strategy, and words of encouragement.

9. **Asynchronous Hands-On Assignment.** I explained that one strategy we can use to increase engagement during synchronous courses is to embed an asynchronous component. Thus, I designed a "micro-learning" experience ahead of time, which consisted of video tutorials, resources to explore, and/or assignments related to the innovative strategy featured in each session (an example can be found here). Participants were given 12 minutes to work at their own pace on this asynchronous, hands-on assignment. They remained in the Teams meeting, which was silent, while they explored the resources independently.

10. **Discussion / Q&A.** After the asynchronous, hands-on assignment, participants came back to the Teams meeting to share their ideas and ask questions. The Featured Faculty responded to these suggested ideas and answered any questions.

11. **Session Evaluation.** With five minutes left in the session, participants were asked to complete an anonymous session evaluation. In the evaluation survey, I asked how likely they were to use the featured strategy and why. I also asked what they liked about the session, how we could make it better, and what other topics they would like to see in future eLSID Engage! events.

Pilot Results

Across the six sessions, I had a total of 124 registrations; 16 of those registrations resulted in a "no show", resulting in 108 participants in total, across all sessions. (Note: Faculty had the option of registering and participating in more than one session) Of those who participated across all the sessions, 70 participants completed the six-question session evaluation, for a 65% response rate.

eLSID Engage! Participation by PD Session Topic

■ Creating a Course Orientation ■ Introduction to Screencasting ■ Integrating Student Surveys
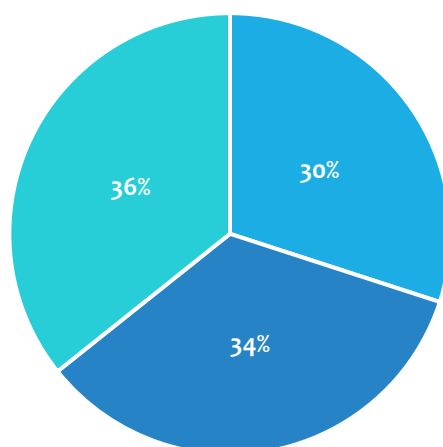
PD session participants were asked to complete a six-question survey at the end of their session. If the participant opted to complete the evaluation, only the first three questions required a response in order to submit feedback.

eLSID Engage! PD Session Survey

My primary interest was in discovering the likelihood that participants would use the featured strategy in their courses (Question 2). Across all three sessions, the average response was 4.57 and the mode was 5 (response options ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 being *Not likely* and 5 being *Very likely*). Thus, a majority of participants across all sessions indicated they were very likely to adopt the featured strategy.

Question 3 asked participants to share why they were or were not likely to use the featured strategy. While only a small number of participants reported they were not likely to implement the strategy, those who did stated they were either not currently teaching (which meant they could not implement the strategy at this time) or stated they did not have time to implement. However, most reported they were very likely to implement the featured strategy for the following reasons (representative quotes provided):

- *The content and activities in the session were practical*
  - "The advice is actionable and clear. I will be implementing them moving forward in my courses."
- *The presented strategy is proven to help students*
  - "I love it! Very useful way to improve our courses. I think this is a great idea for making the course work better for students - and isn't that what it is all about?"
- *The format of the session made it likely that I will use the strategy*
  - "I found the layout of the session to be super engaging and not overwhelming at all. It had a nice mix of activities that I know students will appreciate."

Question 4 (which was optional) asked participants what they liked about the session. All 70 participants responded to this question. The following key themes emerged from their comments, highlighting the most liked features of the PD sessions (representative quotes provided):

- Interactive
  - "Very interactive. I like the opening with the music and sharing positive feedback. I also like the independent activity giving us exposure as to how to implement the strategy in our course. The activity had good directions and I liked the associated videos."
- Modeling
  - "The modeling of the mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities was great to "see" in action. I like having the asynchronous time to work at my own pace."
- Hearing from Faculty
  - "I like how you have chosen an instructor to share their success and that this person is live and available at the meeting to talk with us. I also like how there is an assignment for us to work on independently."
- Session Format
  - "I loved the resources! Also, there was very little wasted time. I appreciate the thoughtfulness of the session. Extremely well organized."

Question 5 (optional) asked participants to share how the session could be improved. Because most participants in these sessions are professional educators, it can be valuable to ask if they have suggestions for improvement. Though there were 58 responses, the most common comment was something similar to "Nothing comes to mind." Of the few comments that offered specific suggestions, the three most common were making the sessions longer (n=3), cutting some of the introduction activities (n=2), and lengthening the Q&A portion of the session (n=2; Note: None of the sessions ran out of time to address questions, ideas, or concerns). Although the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, these three most cited suggestions could be considered when designing future sessions.

Question 6 (optional) asked participants to suggest other topics they would like to see offered in this new eLSID Engage! format; 41 participants responded. The following is a rank order of the most-suggested topics:

- Best practices for video creation
- Student collaboration and engagement strategies
- Using Microsoft Teams to engage students during synchronous sessions
- Alternative assessment/evaluation strategies
- Blending synchronous/asynchronous strategies
- Using VidGrid, FlipGrid, and whiteboard apps

Recommendations and Next Steps

Given the number of faculty who participated in eLSID Engage! and the overwhelmingly positive feedback gathered through the evaluation, I recommend offering a series of sessions each month, covering a variety of topics. To make this happen, the eLSID Team will need to identify more faculty

members who are using innovative practices or with whom we can work to pilot new methods/strategies. After identifying additional faculty, we will need to create a micro-documentary to provide a short overview of their practice, create a related, asynchronous hands-on assignment, and then add them to the eLSID Engage! calendar.

Additionally, I recommend following up with these pilot participants in six months to find out whether they have adopted the strategies learned through these sessions. Based on the session evaluation, it is clear that participants' *intended* rate of implementation is very high. However, this follow-up will allow us to determine the *actual* rate of implementation for each strategy.