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Online Professional Learning Communities as Sites for Learning and Connection: Teacher Agency and the Rhizome

Theme: learning and connected communities and technology enhanced learning.

Exploring the relationship between teacher agency and online Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) – specifically the use of social media tools among trainee teachers. The early experiences and reflections of the curriculum development team and trainee teachers.

Integrating social media, both formally and informally into a distance-learning environment, merging the best practices of face-to-face and blended learning.

Providing opportunities for trainee teachers to create and share knowledge, and to connect with educational theory, evidence informed research and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK).

Curriculum architecture

- Heutagogy
- Rhizomatic Learning
- Instructional Design
- Master's level attributes
- Promoting self-determined learning
- High levels of autonomy
- Epistemic curiosity
- willingness to engage and participate.
- Learner-generated content
- Emerging communities of practice,

Ethos

- Topics not weeks
- Course not modules
- It's the journey not the destination
- Assignments as parameters
- The resources are in the room
- The Community is the Curriculum
- Build, Measure, Learn, Grow

"A rhizome ~~ is characterized by 'ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles'"
Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 7)

"Rhizomatic Learning posits, among other things, that the community is the curriculum. That being able to participate with and among those people who are resident in a particular field is a primary goal of learning. In each of my classes the curriculum is, of course, filled with the ideas and connections that pre-exist in the field but the paths that are taken by the students are as individual as they are, and the path taken by the class is made up of the collected paths chosen by all the students, shaped by my influence as an instructor and the impact of those external nodes they manage to contact."

Dave Cormier (2014)

Context

- The site of learning is a distance learning Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) provided by a large University in the North of England
- In partnership with School Based Initial Teacher Training providers (SCITTs)

'Mode 2 involves the close interaction of many actors throughout the process of knowledge production and this means that knowledge production is becoming more socially accountable'. (Gibbons et al. 1994: vii)

"What seems particularly relevant in an age of new media machines, is to better understand the role of ancient forms of human expression that communicate interest, enthusiasm, empathy and recognition—the forms of expression that help real students and real teachers to project their personal presence through electronic pathways". Schutt et al (2009: 146)

