

MA in Digital Cultures
DH 6022

Communities of Practice in Digital Scholarship



Photo by Matteo Vistocco on Unsplash

Introduction



Getting here isn't all that easy. The collaborative document finishes with celebrations on WhatsApp

Introduction

The idea of a community of practice appears simple but can be difficult to achieve. On the face of it we participate in communities of practice each day in work or college but the truly collaborative nature of such teams can be hard to pin down. Like creativity, it is not something that might necessarily be easy to teach.

Digital tools present a double-edged sword in this respect. If a true community of practice is difficult to achieve in person, it is surely even more difficult to reproduce such interpersonal dynamics where personal presence is lacking? At the same time, where a personal presence is missing, the beneficial elements of a community of practice would surely be needed even more keenly. With that in mind, it is useful to explore all avenues for digital tools to replicate these dynamics when the relationships are partly or totally virtual.

The other edge of the sword, of course, is that digital tools can be isolating, making people turn inward or to echo chambers. In this portfolio I explore the dynamics that underpin successful communities of practice, how digital tools can help, as well as hinder, the dynamics of those relationships and present a case study of collaborative writing with student colleagues as an exploration of how a community of practice based on digital tools can be achieved.

Tribes and Visible Knowledge

Tribes and their Role in Disseminating Knowledge

Both Godin and Shirky's talks must have seemed wild in their own way at the time. I'm old enough to remember being invited to join bebo, MySpace and Facebook, if not on the ground floor then on the second or third floor. At the time I didn't feel it was about giving an outlet for "leading while connecting with people", as Godin says of tribes; it was more about not wanting to be left out. If there was a tribal element, it was that I was in the right demographic, the leading edge and I should be on these platforms. It was also interesting to see later the unorganised but very real dropping of bebo and Myspace for the cooler platform. The tribes still migrate, from Facebook to Snapchat to TikTok. More tribes, organised in different ways, but still chaotic.

I remember reading about theories about subcultures in my undergraduate degree; there's quite a famous study of mods and rockers in the UK in the 1960s . but the idea of subcultures, where members showcased and even exaggerated specific characteristics so as to prove an "otherness", I found interesting, if ultimately flawed, I suppose. Are the leaders that Godin speaks

about terribly different in looking to be "different"? Although it does seem a little ironic that some current Internet cultures (influencers etc) seem to tend towards the generic...

Shirky's clear contrast between institution and group collaboration is certainly interesting and seems prescient but has it not always been the case that the hackers of Silicon Valley have tried to eschew institutional norms? Surely it's been a sign of (tribal) pride since the year (digital) dot? If not, Apple's advertising lied to me, and I want to think different...

"Perhaps it's just me but is it not a bit naïve to think that people can be pushed in a certain way?"

There's quite a bit of discussion above about the negative aspects of this tribalism and tying it to the "chaos" predicted by Shirky to last for half a century. Perhaps it's just me but is it not a bit naïve to think that people can be pushed in a certain way? As was mentioned, an inventor can't control what the invention is used for, and this is as true for a platform (or even something as apparently innocent as a meme - hi Pepé - as it was for Guttenburg's printing press. Mike mentions moderation in fora but is this not like fighting a forest fire with a garden hose?

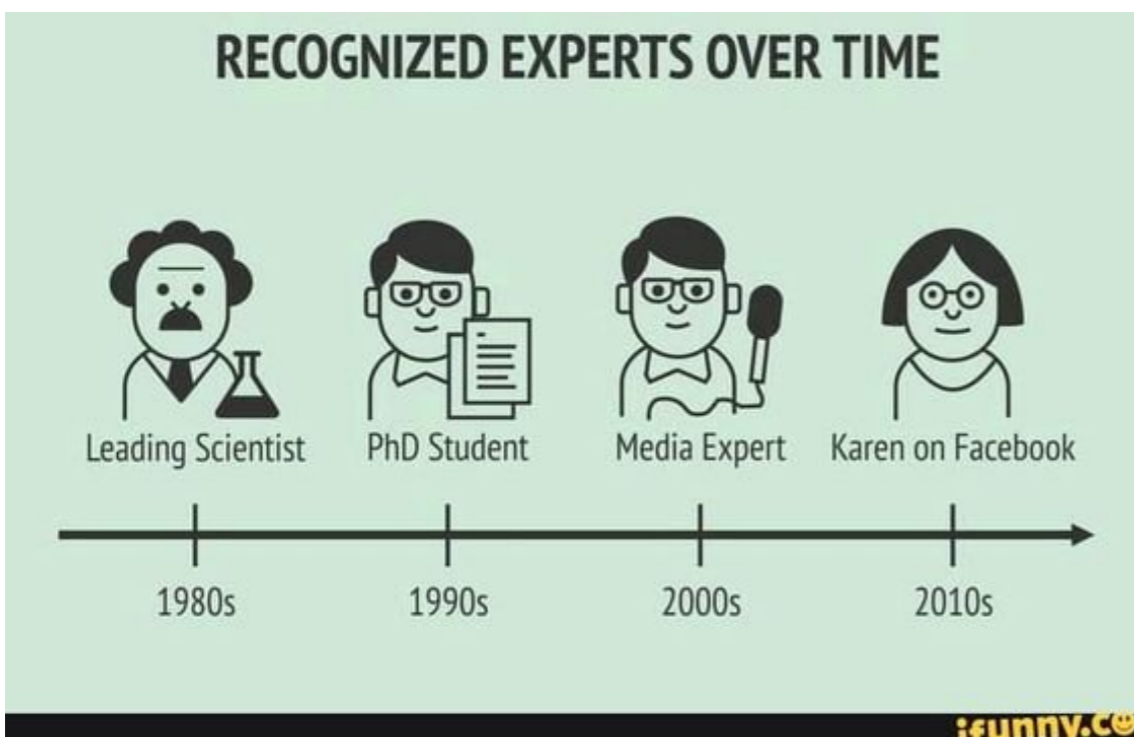
Online Discussions

What's Real and What's Useful

When I did my undergraduate degree the issue was *trying to find the means of collaboration*. Mass adoption of web tools and the Internet was in its infancy so the problem was the silo effect that we all thought the web would solve. Although it seems silos may have just evolved into echo chambers.

So how do you get the most from interconnectedness. First you have to realise that there are horses for courses. There's no point trying to have a serious academic debate on Twitter, for example. It can happen, and it can be successful of course, but it's like trying to eat soup with a fork. Academic debate still works

best in the formal structures of journals and debate fora. We can look at what happened to news media when the expertise was slowly siphoned off for clickbait.



Online - getting a spark or a powder keg

From Crowds to Communities

Finding Focus

Others have focused on how communities of practice and teams are differentiated (as described by the O'Donnell piece), even ruminating on whether we as a class group fit the definition. I'm not entirely convinced forcing the characteristics from Wenger-Traynor, for instance, of domain, community, and practice into a work scenario (or vice versa I suppose) necessarily makes (or does not make) something a community of practice. O'Donnell argues that communities of practice are typically driven by the value provided to individual members, which by definition is different for each member of a group. So could one person's perceived community of practice be another group member's team? Is it all or nothing?

Perhaps I say this because the most obvious example of my participation in a community of practice is actually my work group. We report the proceedings of parliament to a deadline, which is a fairly clear deliverable. The community of practice element comes from the fact that our individual efforts come together to meet the overall goal - we divide the hours of debate (in a structured way) and each of us has the responsibility for our own piece. It is in our common interest to "share knowledge, learn together, create new knowledge, create common practices and develop a sense of solidarity and personal responsibility and autonomy". It's still work though?

This CoP is manifested most frequently when one of the group has some trouble with a piece of debate. We usually send an email looking for the group's input, which is answered within a very

short time. The people who answer don't get anything points for this and it doesn't necessarily help their own work; it's done, I guess, because it helps the group. Is this the "evolutionary growth" in addition to the goal-oriented activity?

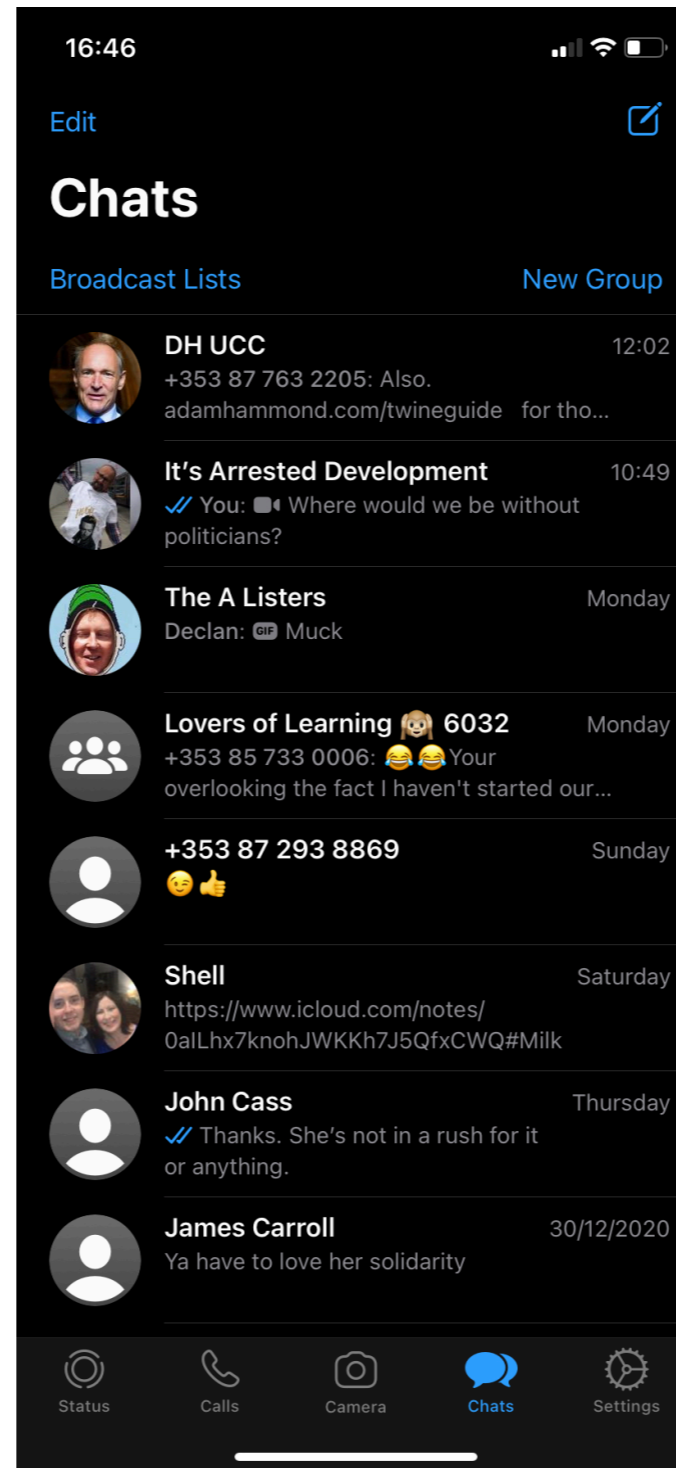
Tying this very briefly to last week's discussion (it was closed before I had the chance to contribute) it is interesting to see the meaning people ascribe to particular forums or platforms. Even taking our group as an example, we work under the assumption that we are in the "process of collective learning" on Canvas and, I suppose by extension, the class WhatsApp group. Yet if the cognitive, social and teaching presence exist, as outlined by Garrison, but where we do not expect it (Twitter, anyone?), does that educational experience not happen, or do we just not ascribe the same educational value to it?

FROM CROWDS TO COMMUNITIES

Blurring the Lines

Perhaps I'm lucky but I've never had a work WhatsApp group in which I felt obliged to participate, for example, and the discussion above seems to imply that the lines drawn in such nebulous work spaces are fuzzy at best. One can spot "deliverables" being mentioned easily enough but what about the "collective commitment to results or goals" mentioned by O'Donnell? Asking for something on a different platform does not change it from being a work or team activity to a part of a community of practice surely?

As an aside, being able to set notifications for Outlook or Teams to come in from 9 to 5 is a godsend. It's a matter of fiddling with settings (that I can never get to a completely satisfactory point) but looking at and actioning everything that comes in as it comes in is just (a) not possible and (b) not good for my brain. My other half actually has as part of her mail signature that she



Where does it stop?

doesn't expect people to reply to emails outside office hours, which I imagine helps people feel that they don't have to do stuff outside of work. Wish more people would do that.

That said, everybody here has passing the module as the top priority (unless there are some very philanthropic souls on here!). A post (or at least the initial post) is very likely to be work towards that purpose and joining this to work that benefits the group is not necessarily something that comes naturally or even easily. It can seem like serving two different masters. In a true community of practice, as outlined by the O'Donnell piece, the journey is to "we communicate, ergo, we create" after rejecting the more individualistic approach. I'm hopeful that as the weeks progress, it'll come a little more easily...

Crowdsourcing

Two Heads...

It's interesting reading people's reflections on the merits and demerits of crowdsourcing, where even projects with apparent cultural or humanitarian benefits can be met with some skepticism, I suppose, or even downright hostility. As others have said, the stock photo example leads us back to the tribe concept all the way back

at week one, Shirky's example of institutions being superseded, to a degree, by group collaboration. There's probably a better selection, a more efficient work process but it comes at the expense of the

"professional class", in this case the photographer. A case of adapt or die for the professional class?

Again going back to Godin in the first week, crowdsourcing only works if there is a common interest. I liked Mike's description of "digital knitting" but networks of common interest have existed before the digital tools to link so easily became available. As Singletary describes the changed process for

academics in a digital community, so it would have been for any type of group collaboration. For likes of the Open Street mapping, it was surely the tools available as much as the common interest in the group that made it so successful?

Wikipedia, the citizen journalist mentioned above - seen as beneficial and yet

there's always a "but". My first real involvement with crowdsourcing was folding@home. didn't have to do anything at all, really, but I participated. Is a process better or worse if you participate more?



Every little helps

Collaborative Writing

Initial Topic Ideas

- Social media and the new construction of reality – I'm genuinely bemused when I see things like what is on the Influencers in the Wild timeline. Especially this year, a greater proportion of life seems to be lived in this constructed online reality and I literally can't explain the motivations behind it (they can't all be looking for free cake!)
- Grounding social media in history. Twitter, TikTok, Instagram seem to be very much about the right now. What is the half-life of a Twitter post or an Internet trend? On the flip side, what happens when this approach to social media seems to come at the expense of, well, actual history?
- And a nice broad topic – the future of learning.

Collaborative Writing - Initial Topic Ideas



Mike Cosgrave

30 Oct 2020 at 00:00

Simple thing here – a few lines, even just bullets, picking out your top 3 topics which you would like to work on for the Collaborative writing exercise!

It starts...

How's This Going to Work?

Pardon the pun, but the most difficult part of collaborative writing I've found is getting people on the same page. One can never underestimate the slight variations in understanding of a particular task that can manifest even over a short document of a couple of hundred words, and that's before dealing with the variations in writing style and how to divvy up a task.

In my day job I work on a giant collaborative document every day but the difference to what we are doing is that we split up the task into discrete sections. The most difficult part is making sure the discrete parts tie together. Following a dedicated style guide means variations in writing style (character!) should diminish but they can never really be eliminated, so I find that's not worth worrying about too much beyond following formal grammatical and syntax rules. In my experience, get the content right (hard facts etc.) then worry about the niceties of pulling the piece together. A good editor should be able to do that with a minimum of fuss. If one of the group is a decent editor and another is a subject matter expert, there really shouldn't be any insurmountable problems; if everybody can try their hand at both of these tasks, it should be a walk in the park (!)

Zhou, Simpson and Domizi, in assessing the effectiveness of Google Docs as an out-of-class collaboration platform, come to the conclusion that, almost ten years after the study, should be clear to everybody working through a

pandemic; 93% of students considered it useful for group work. More surprising was that there was no measured effect on students' learning despite the fact that "information can be traded easily" on the platform.

Google Docs (and the Microsoft transition to Office 365 and now Microsoft 365) pushed people to working in the cloud rather than on files stored locally on a PC or database server. This changed the process of work fundamentally; no longer were versions of a file mailed to and fro with endless revisions but rather it became possible for multiple people to work on a document while it was open together. MS Teams, used now for video calls as much as anything else, is essentially a user-friendly (!) front end for sharing and collaborating on files using Microsoft's Sharepoint and OneDrive platforms, replicating the functionality of Google Docs.

Not to be underestimated is the chat feature within Google Docs.

Collaboration still requires communication between stakeholders, and a rule of thumb that seems to hold is that the closer this is to real time, the better. Email is good, instant chat is better but a conversation is best. Practical considerations usually dictate it gets more difficult to get an entire team in a room the more members that team has; the pandemic makes this practically impossible. The chat function (in Google or MS Teams, or even WhatsApp in a pinch) could prove invaluable to a collaboration, as it's the most likely space to have a productive (virtual) conversation.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Getting Started

It starts with somebody taking the first step, of course. It can be a difficult step!

The process for our group began with the Canvas VLE and the possibility of creating smaller groups from the class. Within this was the possibility to link to collaborative tools and I decided that a collaborative Google Doc document, as facilitated by the Canvas UI, could be created easily enough and I and the other group members could exchange messages on our first steps here.

Discussion: Writing Groups - Learning

from 2021-DH6032

So, two things are happening this week

1. You are writing a first 500 words, unplanned, on the collaborative writing topic, hopefully by Friday or Saturday. Share a link to that in the other, group logistics thread (but you can also share the link here, to be sure to be sure) (Next week you will combine these in a single google doc, and be of negotiating these into a single, elegant flowing text.)

I cannot stress enough that what I am most interested in is the process of collaborative writing, giving positive peer critique (readings on that coming in later weeks, when we need them!) and negotiating in detail about the text. I'm not worried about the quality of the finished product, but it is

2. Note, briefly, any previous experiences which you have had about group work and how you felt about them. Then pick one of the readings each, and share here the key takeaways from it that you think are useful to your group. (200-300 words will do, keep it snappy) Reflect also on how that to your own experience of group work. There are three readings, so each should get hit by 2 people. The interplay of ideas from the readings may provide a different texture of online discussion to what we've had so far. These readings should help to shape how you plan the group work. Next week those online in our Monday meetings at 12:30 or 7pm. (along with any questions about the process of the writing exercise)

Search entries or author

Unread



Write a reply...



David Cass

13 Nov 2020

Hello guys, I've gone ahead and set up a Google doc through the collaboration bit there on the left hand side. I've added the people in the learning group so I hope you can all access it [here](#) . Hope this is okay for everybody. Now I feel like I've done some work, I'm going to have a coffee...

Reply (3 likes)



Super work David - All looks good our end after we tested it together this morning. Fingers crossed everyone can access it.

I found the collaborative document by going into Groups > then, Collaborations .. for anyone whose having trouble with the link.

Reckon we could post the 500 words here or directly into the document to begin. Whatever works best for everyone -we can see what the general consensus of everyone is :)

I'm with you on the coffee buzz for now...

Edited by Poppy Breheny on 13 Nov 2020 at 11:11

Reply




14 Nov 2020

Thanks for taking the time to set that up David, I am denied access at the moment to the Google Docs, just awaiting your confirmation.

I don't mind where we post the 500 words, I'll just need access if it's to be in the Docs

Reply


COLLABORATIVE WRITING

 [Redacted] 16 Nov 2020

I'm not 100% clear on where we are going and what route we are taking. Does the Google Doc that David created contain each of our 500 words that we need to manipulate into a smaller size, or are we using it to discuss our document?


I would like to discuss our progress in this forum and do our edits in the Google Doc. What do ye think?

← Reply 🍌 (2 likes)

 David Cass 16 Nov 2020


Yes that's my reading of it too. The document in Google Docs would be "the collaborative document" and all the discussion etc. happens elsewhere. I'd suggest making the sort of top-level and practical/housekeeping decisions in a group here (overarching theme or direction, whether it needs a particular focus, whether it is too vague etc, for example) and then the nuts and bolts about moving or deleting sections, adding to or changing sections etc. to the likes of the comments or "suggestions" view in Google Docs. Would that work?

← Reply 🍌 (1 likes)

 [Redacted] 16 Nov 2020


That sounds perfect to me David.

← Reply 🍌 (2 likes)

 [Redacted] 16 Nov 2020


Sounds great to me guys. Think I would agree to keep Google Docs separate simply for the collaborative drafts and editing as we work through the process etc.
Discussions as you both mentioned will be nice and visible for everyone here for sure.
Would you suggest we set up a separate What's App group or arrange time for a M Teams meeting the odd week also to catch up on any brief questions that people might have etc?

← Reply 🍌 (1 likes)

 [Redacted] 16 Nov 2020


I am only seeing the discussions here now whoops! Thought I would have gotten a notification. Yes, I think a Whats App group would be very handy for small bits of communication and organisation of a teams meeting. [Redacted]

← Reply 🍌

 [Redacted] 16 Nov 2020

I wont lie, I am new to Google Docs and still trying to work out how to @ you all in the comment chat as we go - I'll try muster up a google docs video when I get the time to practice away with the tool :)

← Reply 🍌

 David Cass 16 Nov 2020

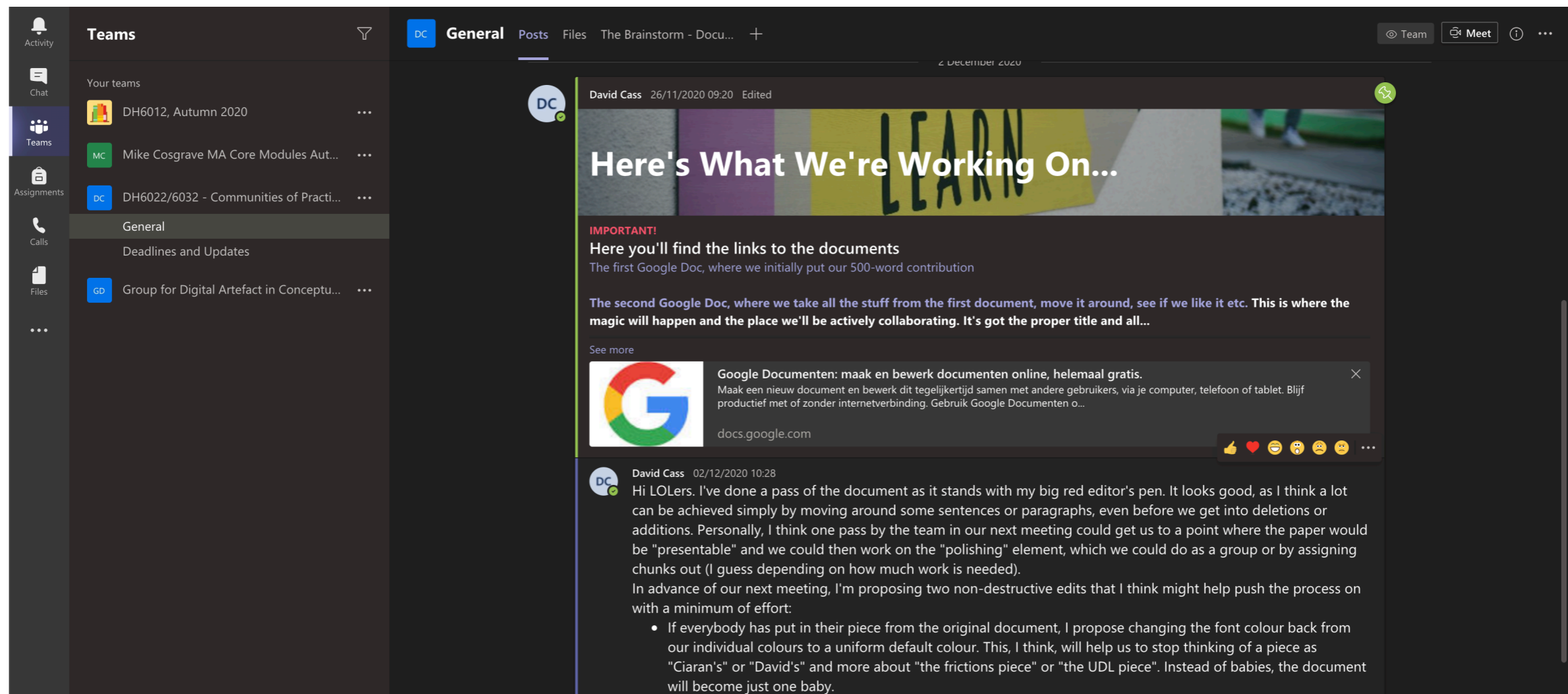
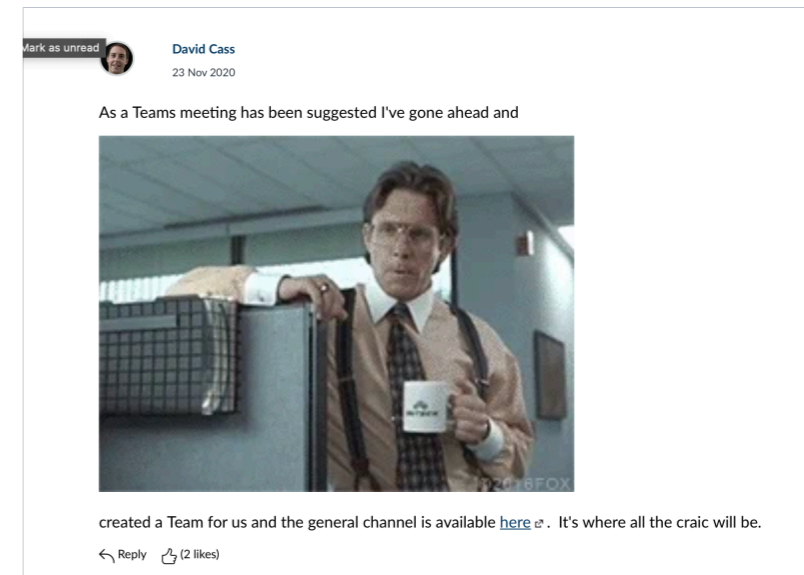
Think the comments are persistent - ie they'll stay until somebody marks them as resolved - but the notifications will be set up by a user so don't think you have much control over other people's notifications. The chat function seems to be just there if two or more people are working on the document at the same time and it's not persistent (or I can't find a history if it is) so it's akin to having the chat over a document at someone's desk or something.

It's inevitable that there will be some initial confusion or lack of clarity among group members as to the exact task at hand. This can be delicate as to be truly collaborative, all members must work towards a similar goal rather than one or more taking a more managerial or directing role. So before a word is written it can be vital to foster the community spirit, even if it is virtual in this case. There is already discussion of expanding the community to other platforms!

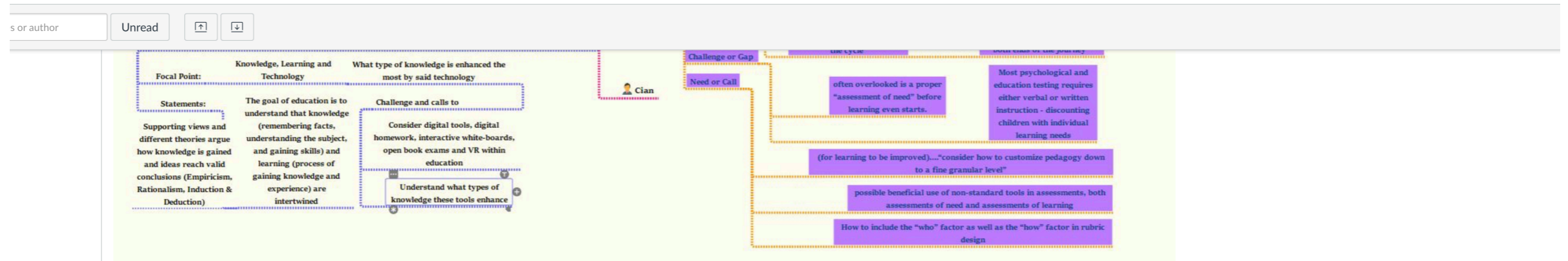
COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Going Further and Group Dynamics

Although the collaborative document will, almost without exception, take shape on a collaboration platform (Google Docs in this case but it could just as easily have been Microsoft 365), the other fora can be just as vital in ensuring the necessary logistics of collaboration are met. Microsoft Teams was used for the more formal meeting and notice of work, including minutes of meetings (along with Canvas where necessary). Notices were replicated on Canvas, which may have been a redundancy but it was a failsafe to ensure nobody was out of the loop. WhatsApp was used in a less formal way but it was also vital to the community.



COLLABORATIVE WRITING



on 20 Nov 2020 at 13:02

Reply (3 likes)



David Cass
21 Nov 2020

That's some really good work. I've actually been wondering whether there's a real benefit to *all* of us doing a mind map of the contributions so far - will it actually have the effect of putting more information out there for us to wade through? There is the really important point person doesn't exert too much influence over group direction but should this really happen with something like a mind map, which despite being subjective to a point should end up with relatively objective outcomes, ie the mind maps shouldn't be terribly different, and if they are, well my own experience of collaborative documents is that too much information (or most often, just *talking about the information or task*) is what stalls progress.

I should say that I'm just throwing this up for discussion and not saying it should be done. I've actually done a map (not as comprehensive as your wonderful example Poppy!) but thought I'd pose the question before putting it up here. Your map builds on my visualisation but I was thinking it just wasn't *adding anything* to the conversation?

I think, especially looking at your work above, that there's a decent basis for a coherent document but I'm curious as to what the next best step would be that does not just add to the noise!

Edited by David Cass on 21 Nov 2020 at 6:31

Reply (1 likes)



21 Nov 2020

Just saw this now David - before I had shared the map in the 6013 just in case your wondering was I losing my marbles 😊

Certainly, you have a point - I was thinking the same myself - Would 5 maps be a serious overload and really just add extra work when you think about having to compile them into one then...??

This one might add nothing 😊 Just gave it a shot myself to understand and dig deeper into what I thought people were interested in. I do see huge benefit in that personally as it helped me get a clearer picture and annotate some quotes I thought were fitting.

We definitely have a structure that could be played with ... I think myself its a case of maybe working out how it should be laid out.. it.... Where's our starting point, what would flow nicely into a body, and which parts we could use as a conclusion... That would at least give us the we add the meat 😊

We might even want to visually represent some ideas I don't know.

I'm only spitting out what's coming into my head here.. Its a hard one for sure...Any thoughts you guys??

Reply



David Cass
21 Nov 2020

I think the work is great - I did a map for Mike's other module first and then came back to this one but what I have isn't a patch on yours. I'm happy to work off that (or even some variation if others would like to input something on it).

What I *do* find good about the mapping is being able to move bits around and make things clearer as such, which might make things a bit easier in laying out the doc? I wonder if there's a collaborative version of a mind mapping app. Hmm....

Reply (1 likes)

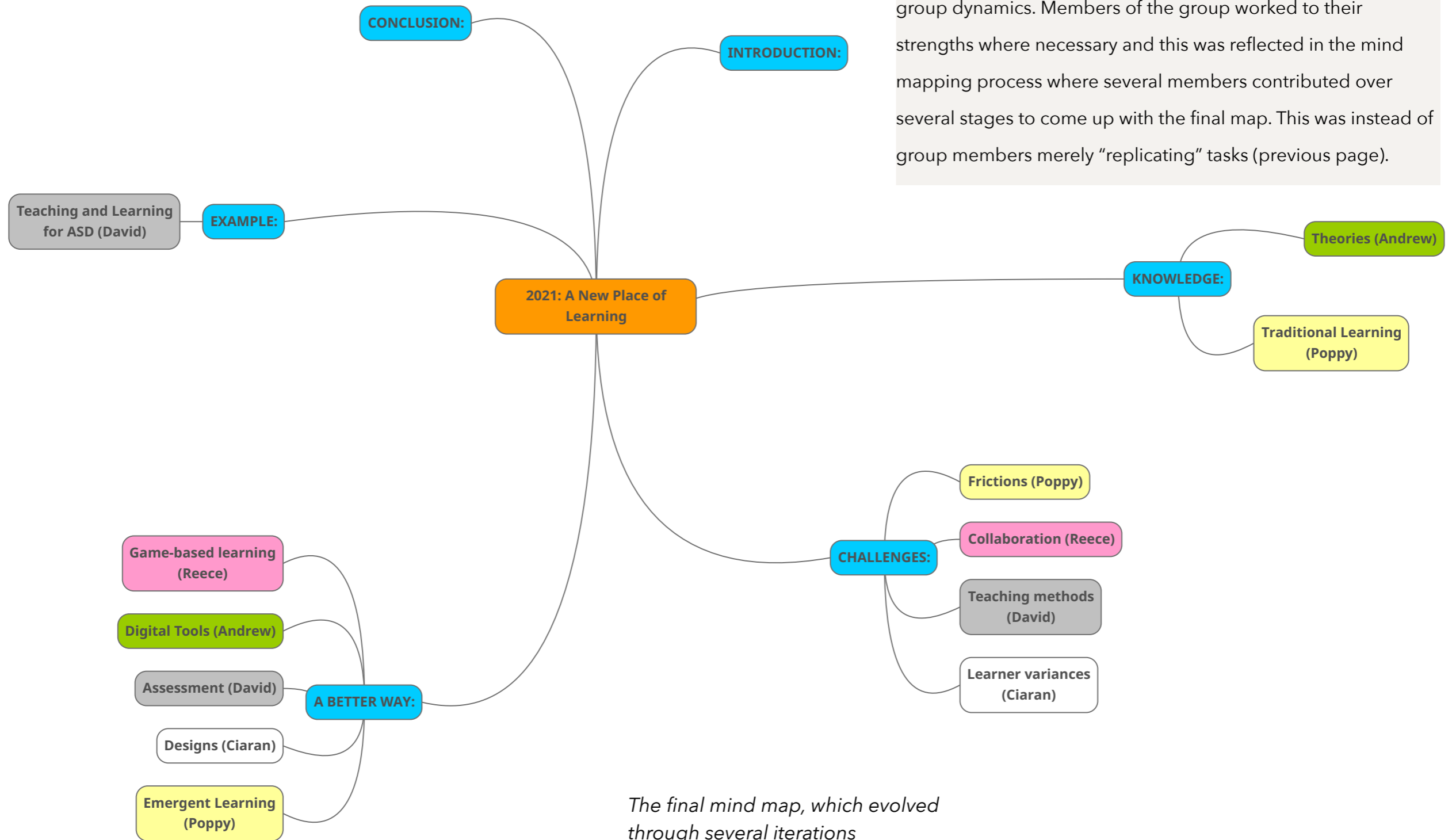


21 Nov 2020

That would be magic.. Imagine that.. Lets keep an eye out and see what we can find...!!

COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Once the initial logistics bedded in, it was important to leverage group dynamics. Members of the group worked to their strengths where necessary and this was reflected in the mind mapping process where several members contributed over several stages to come up with the final map. This was instead of group members merely "replicating" tasks (previous page).



The final mind map, which evolved through several iterations

COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Nuts and Bolts

Getting the sausage made is unavoidable. The process is facilitated and made easier by the likes of MS Teams and camaraderie can be fostered by WhatsApp but the collaboration must actually *happen*. It is a process that cannot be rushed and there are very few shortcuts if the work is to be truly collaborative. The following pages compare an early draft to the finished article.

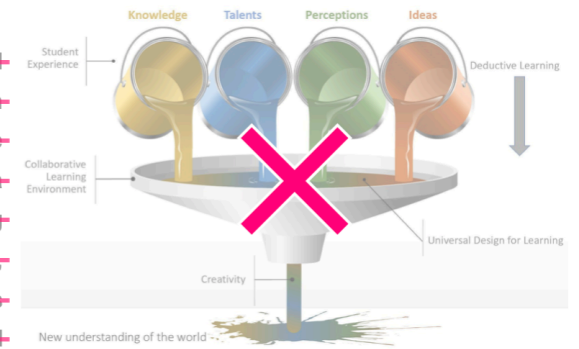
The screenshot shows a Microsoft Teams chat window titled "Communities of Practice/Collaborative Writing Exercise". The main chat area displays a document titled "Learning" with an "Introduction" section containing a placeholder paragraph: "This is a placeholder paragraph for an introduction. I hope the rest of you can see this!". Below this, a message from David Cass says: "Great start David - Thanks a million for this. For the introduction you guys, would people be happy to post the 500 words here? words here?". A right-hand sidebar shows a list of messages with timestamps and author names, including Andrew Burke, Poppy Jean Breheny, and David Cass. A context menu is open over the most recent message, showing options: "Restore this version", "Name this version", and "Make a copy".

How it started vs How it's going.

Introduction ¶

~~Learning has grown up. Facilitated by the culture of sharing on which the World Wide Web is based, the Cartesian view of knowledge as a transferable substance is being superseded by a more social view, where the content and the process are inextricably linked (Sceley and Adler, 2008). ¶~~

~~As knowledge and learning are intertwined in this digital age, it is important, Cian Ferguson~~



Introduction

This is a placeholder paragraph for an introduction.

Thinking about learning can only really be done if we also consider two other dependent elements, which are teaching and assessments. Knowledge and learning are intertwined with each other.

What I want to look at is how we can use technology within learning environments to give the best learning experience and which type of knowledge-gain gaining knowledge is enhanced the most by the leveraging of this technology. Moreover, if we are to rethink learning as a whole, it can only really be done if we consider two other dependent

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~~elements of teaching and assessments. This article interrogates the elements of learning and considers the challenges evident in the evolving learning environment before considering some digital led innovations for pedagogical practice. ¶~~

¶

~~Concepts, Traditions and a New Learning Spacesaid tech.~~

Initial Draft

Communities of Practice/Collaborative Writing Exercise

Learning

Introduction

This is a placeholder paragraph for an introduction.

Reece

I have worked on a few group projects, some personal and some academic. The few personal group projects I have worked on have been film projects such as helping St John's Film & Screen Media students with recording and editing footage. The academic projects I have worked on have also consisted of a few film projects, but mostly collaborative writing projects. Over the years of doing these group projects I have come to realize that when the work is delegated equally among all the members of the group, there should be little to no issues. However, it is when work is unequally delegated that most issues in group projects will arise. From reading your discussion posts and work so far, I don't think we will have this issue at all as everyone in the course seems to be extremely competent and well able to understand the concepts/readings that are given to us. I'm excited to begin this group project and to see the final work that will be compiled by all our collaborative efforts!

My interest in learning mostly stems from Game-based learning as that's what I want to focus my dissertation on – Serious Gaming. However, I am interested in other forms of learning also and this collaborative project will be extremely beneficial for me as it will give me a much broader view of learning.

I chose the reading by Dr Rikke Ørngreen and Dr. Karin Tweddell Levinsen "Proceedings of the 13th European Conference on e-Learning" to look at. Straight away in the reading they cite a study by Zhou et al which says that students who engaged in collaborating through Google Docs became less dependent on Facebook and text messaging and focused on communicating through the Docs and email more. I think this is an interesting thing to note as I have only used Google Docs twice before to do collaborative writing projects and both times, I've not had to use Facebook messenger or text messaging as the Google Docs folder & email were much handier and sufficient. I think that one of the best bits of the reading, however, is this line about how collaborative writing efforts stimulate critical reflection which is extremely important when trying to improve your own writing

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Final Draft

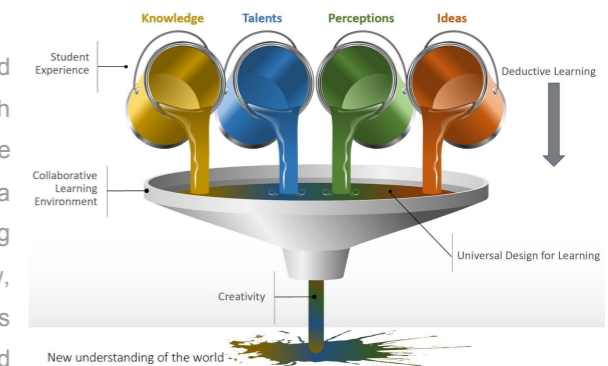
Communities of Practice/Collaborative Writing Exercise

2021: A New Place of Learning

Authored by David Cass, Poppy Breheny, Ciarán Henson, Andrew Burke, Reece O Reilly Butler - 2093 words

Introduction

Learning has grown up. Facilitated by the culture of sharing on which the World Wide Web is based, the Cartesian view of knowledge as a transferable substance is being superseded by a more social view, where the content and the process are inextricably linked (Seeley and Adler, 2008).



As knowledge and learning are intertwined in this digital age, it is important to look at how we can use technology within learning environments to give the best learning experience and which type of knowledge gain is enhanced the most by the leveraging of this technology. Moreover, if we are to rethink learning as a whole, it can only really be done if we consider two other dependent elements of teaching and assessments. This article interrogates the elements of learning and considers the challenges evident in the evolving learning environment before considering some digital-led innovations for pedagogical practice.

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Initial Draft

Communities of Practice/Collaborative Writing Exercise

"It is assumed that learning through collaboration stimulates critical reflection, because it provides students with the opportunity to articulate their reasoning and perhaps become aware of shortcomings and strategies they did not think of on their own"

Finally, I think that this topic is extremely important nowadays as we all struggle to learn and educate ourselves through digital learning (due to COVID-19) and attempt to adapt as best we can to it. I think that the COVID pandemic has led to some interesting developments in terms of digital learning and the advantages and disadvantages associated with it. It'll be interesting to develop on this further with you all and discuss these concepts in a group meeting.

Learning, Teaching and Assessment (David)

Thinking about learning can only really be done if we also consider two other dependent elements, which are teaching and assessments. The type of learning that takes place is a direct consequence of the teaching methods that are employed to start with; a professional course on a specific topic such as GDPR sits more on the instruction side of the spectrum, whereas a "book club" scenario leans more on self-directed "discovery" by the participants, with little or no active "teaching". The crucial nature of the pedagogy is often overlooked or taken for granted, especially when the teaching must be done on a mass scale, such as in primary and secondary education, but for learning to be improved, we must consider how to customise pedagogy down to a fine granular level.

The assessment element can be seen from both ends of the education journey; an important point often overlooked is a proper "assessment of need" before learning even starts. Some types of education are preceded by matriculation or the likes of psychometric testing. Whereas these may meet practical requirements of forming classes, they are often a blunt tool that gives more useful data on a group rather than individual level.

As an example, my son has autism and is non-verbal. As most psychological and education testing requires either verbal or written instruction, he has never been properly assessed because there is no assessment of need tool in common use that does not require this verbal or written communication. Like any other child, he has

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Final Draft

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Concepts, Traditions and a New Learning Space

Knowledge is the remembering of facts and information, the understanding of a subject and gaining skills to use in life. Learning is the professional process of gaining knowledge and experience, for example, by attending an academic institution. There are different theories as to which is the most effective way of learning. Empiricism is the theory that knowledge is gained through sensory experiences, while rationalism is the theory that knowledge is gathered independent from our senses and is based on reason. As for methods, deductive learning is taking a broad idea and coming to a specific conclusion, while inductive learning is taking a specific idea and coming to a broad conclusion. The former is more teacher focused, while the latter is centred on the student. Each of these theories and methods can be mixed and matched to create effective learning depending on what is being taught.

The question remains, how has learning been achieved traditionally? The concept of "Learning" could branch out into many interesting nodes for one to research given the broad scope of its nature and connected terminologies that have been researched. In analysis of the narratives, we are drawn to reconsider some of the traditions within education to help expose both the challenges and diverse pedagogies at play here.

Authors like Prosser & Trigwell (1999), as cited in Healey (2005), have recognised the practise of tutor-led & teacher-to-student methodologies used by educators. They position these on the grounds of the more traditional approaches that are still being used - a link to what Healey acknowledges as traditional "*transmission models of teaching*" (Healey, 2005, p.190-191; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; p.155).

Perhaps, such traditional approaches are in a sense today an old-fashioned method of "*transmission*" - one that needs to be addressed within educational approaches. A major consideration that might also require reflection is how to build "*circumstances*" for deeper understanding as Robinson suggested (Robinson, 2010, 4:20).

The type of learning that takes place is a direct consequence of the teaching methods that are employed to start with. For example, a professional course on a specific topic

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learning needs but with the ability to properly assess them, such needs will probably remain unmet.

Related to this is the possible beneficial use of non-standard tools in assessments, both assessments of need and assessments of learning. For example, my son uses [a picture-based communication app](#) in his school, but neither type of assessment can really cope with such a device being used. For people with other special educational needs, including people with partial sight, deafness or dyslexia, for example, the usual assessment pathways are by design putting them at an additional disadvantage.

The assessment of learning should ideally see the same customisation that is really required on the pedagogical side. If rubric design concentrates solely on how to assess learning without taking into account *who* is learning and in what way, potential will be lost to measure or assess in the best possible way. The difficulty, of course, in most learning environments is how to include this factor before a person has even entered the learning environment; this flows back to an accurate assessment of need, as if such an assessment is done either before or in tandem with rubric design, it may lead to a better assessment at the end of the learning cycle.

Learning should be an evolving process that would ideally adapt to conditions as it moves through parts of the cycle. Not including the elements of teaching and assessment in this process of adaptation would put the entire learning cycle at a distinct disadvantage.

Collaborative Intro - Figuring out a deeper approach for learning : Poppy

The topic of "Learning" could branch out into many interesting nodes that one could follow given the broad scope of its nature and the connected terminology. Upon reflection, I found myself drawn to reconsider some of the traditions within education that have been incorporated into former models of learning as they may help expose both the challenges and diverse pedagogies at play here.

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such as GDPR sits more on the instruction side of the spectrum, whereas a "book club" scenario leans more on self-directed "discovery" by the participants, with little or no active "teaching". The crucial nature of the pedagogy is often overlooked or taken for granted, especially when the teaching must be done on a mass scale, such as in primary and secondary education. For learning to be improved, we must consider how to customise pedagogy down to a fine granular level.

Challenges

Robinson (2010) vocalized in one of his Ted talks that education has an unsettling potential to "*dislocate people from their natural talents*" (Robinson, 2010, 4:05). As we continue to move more deeply into online digital realms, now more than ever might be the perfect period to consider possible "*frictions*" that have appeared within learning approaches - "*existential challenges*" that have traditionally blocked the way for skills like "*collaboration*" and "*creativity*" to be practised (Robinson, 2019). These frictions within society are perhaps resolvable as Robinson (2019) suggests. Yet as educators, we must each play our part.

Healey (2005) and others have inspired us to consider variations that may exist between deductive learning that is "*transmitted*" by tutors, and inductive learning that has more student "*activity*", possibilities for analytical thought, and opportunities for "*deeper*" learning and understanding to take place (Healey, 2005; Gibbs, 1988 in Healey, 2005, p. 191).

If we are to consider these frictions in the context of digital learning today and learning for the future, we need to question how we can build learning "*conditions*" (Williams et al, 2011, p. 42), design curricula that will set the scene for the more student-led learning environments and allow for this "*deeper*" learnings to be reached (Healy, 2005).

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In recent times and as we continue to move more deeply into realms like online learning and digital schooling, now more than ever might be the perfect period to consider possible “frictions” that have appeared within learning approaches - “*existential challenges*” that have traditionally blocked talents like “*collaboration*” and critical thinking. These frictions, or as Sir Ken Robinson recently called “*enmities*” are resolvable but we must each play our part. (Robinson, 2019).

Robinson vocalized back in one of his former Ted talks that education itself has an unsettling potential to “*dislocate people from their natural talents*” (4:05). He encouraged an educational “*revolution*” to begin and a call for us to build learning conditions that make room for more “*emergent*” (Williams et, al, 2011) and “*organic learning*” (Robinson, 2010).

In our efforts to appreciate these traditional frictions and build the future conditions, I would hope that we could bring about a clearer picture, embracing the possibilities that researchers, academics, educators and society as a whole can incorporate into the future of learning environments. An effort to help us plan, emerge, and apply new ways of digital knowledge construction that could enhance the future of learning for our learners.

Healy (2005), from a reading that Mike provided us with this week in the Learning and Teaching Module, inspired me to consider the dimensions of curricular design and the friction that may exist between “*surface*” knowledge transmission (recall, memorization, teacher focused instruction) versus the “*deep approach*” learnings – where knowledge is active, meanings are made, thought is critical, and concepts can revolutionize (Biggs, 2003; Brew & Boud, 1995; Prosser & Trigwells, 1999, p. 155; as cited in Healy, 2005, p. 191). Williams et, al. (2011) expands on the notion of knowledge that “*emerges*”, whereby the tutors, “*actors and system co-evolve*”.

[PB1]

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When considering these frictions posed by digital learning today (and for the future) - people often look to different methods of learning. One of these different methods is Collaborative Learning.

Collaborative Learning can be described as “The educational approach of using groups to enhance learning through working together”. During the last few years, digital collaborative learning has increased globally with the aid of online discussion practice. Much like with any form of learning, however, there are challenges, such as inactivity and the existential challenges as mentioned above. With online discussion practice, people get to do online asynchronous discussions that enable all the students to be active and choose the best suited conditions to them (Aleksic-Maslac et al, 2009). However, a drawback to this method of collaborative learning is that many students may be inactive due to a lack of deadlines or pressure. An increase in inactivity in Online Discussion Practice renders any learning much less effective than when people are actively engaged. These types of issues can potentially be avoided by successful teaching.

The variability of student learning poses many challenges to effective teaching strategies. These variances include: how students process information; the different speeds that students work at; special needs; family backgrounds; prior learning and experience; how students approach a task; how they communicate; and how they organise and process information. The varied needs of students make it difficult to prepare lessons that align properly with national standards.

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[Add to document](#)

If we are to truly consider these frictions and place them in the context of digital learning today and learning for the future, we need to question first how we can build the conditions and design curriculums that will set the scene for the more student-led learning environments and allow for these “deeper” learnings to be reached.

One major consideration that I believe needs to be addressed is not only how to “create these circumstances” for this deeper understanding as Robinson suggested (Robinson, 2010, 4:20), but more importantly figure out a way that we can reward them. Gone are the days of star charts and rigorous grading really. These are old traditions, old-fashioned methods of assessment perhaps. We need more feedback, more positive reward within digital learning tools and technologies, and as Robinson calls for ... more “personalization” (Robinson, 2019).

Universal Design for Learning

[Ciarán]

Learning has evolved so rapidly in the past two decades and the educational landscape is almost unrecognisable from what it once was. With the increasing availability of technology in education, students now have the chance to learn in so many differentiated ways. During this time, governments, organisations and communities have become more aware of making their physical environments accessible to everyone. What has been left behind somewhat is how we think about education and how we make it accessible for everyone.

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A Better Way

Leveraging Personalised Strategies

Williams et al. (2011) expands on the notion of knowledge that can “emerge”, and on the opportunities that Web 2.0 has afforded us to help create emergent learning “conditions” whereby tutors, “actors and system co-evolve” (Williams et al., 2011, p. 40; De Freitas & Conole 2010).

In our search for a better way, we might need to contemplate not only how to “create these circumstances” for “natural talents” to emerge (Robinson, 2010, 4:20), but also to try to add more feedback, more “organic learning” and what Robinson believes is necessary - “personalization” (Robinson, 2019).

For example, UDL is a strategy for identifying potential barriers within the learning environment so they can be reduced or eliminated. Educators need to keep UDL to the forefront of their thoughts when designing modules and courses. There is no excuse for them not to do so with so many technologies at their disposal. Many schools and educational institutions are using UDL principles to create more learner-centred and inclusive learning environments. Results in these schools have shown that increased accessibility leads to improved personalization and greater success for students (*The Expert Learner Project: A UDL Success Story* | *The Inclusion Lab*, 2016).

Understanding UDL can help teachers, lecturers, instructors and other educational leaders to talk about inclusion, technology and student success with all stakeholders. This framework can help learning coaches assist teachers in understanding the diverse learning needs of their students. The principles of UDL can also inform future curriculum development to ensure learning outcomes, understanding goals, resources and assessments are tailored to meet the needs of a wider range of students. A UDL design will benefit all students by increasing student engagement, helping teachers better support every one of their students, and enhancing academic success. We need to build a shared understanding for supporting every student. The technological era has

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An educational approach called Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was pioneered by David Rose and his colleagues at the Centre for Applied Special Technology [1]. It's a way of addressing the different learning needs of students right from the start, thinking about the diversity of learners and reducing barriers to learning. Diversity could include differences in background knowledge and experience, learning preferences, learning strengths and abilities, personal interests and levels of engagement. UDL means identifying potential barriers within the learning environment so they can be reduced or eliminated. Educators need to keep UDL to the forefront of their thoughts when designing modules and courses. There is no excuse for them not to do so with so many technologies at their disposal.

Many schools are using UDL principles to create more learner centred and inclusive learning environments. Results in these schools have shown that increased accessibility leads to more success for more students [2]. A UDL approach benefits all students, including students with disabilities. It helps blur the line between regular education and special education [3].

UDL is based on 3 main principles:

1. Multiple means of representation, giving learners different ways to acquire information and knowledge;
2. Multiple means of action and expression, giving learners different ways to demonstrate what they know; and
3. Multiple means of engagement tapping into learners' different interests, challenging them appropriately, and motivating them to learn.

Another key aspect for educators to remember when their courses is to set high expectations for every student. The UDL principles rely on the use of technology to ensure learning sources and environments are accessible and engaging for all students.

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arrived and is here to stay. We need to use it to bring every student along with us, and leave no student behind.

Making Every Student Count

An example might be a non-verbal child with autism. As most psychological and education testing requires either verbal or written instruction, it can make assessment of such cases difficult. Like any other child, he or she has learning needs but without the ability to properly assess them, such needs will probably remain unmet. There is possible benefit in using non-standard tools in assessments - both assessments of need and assessments of learning. For people with special educational needs, including people with partial sight, deafness or dyslexia, for example, the usual assessment pathways are by design putting them at an additional disadvantage.

The personalisation and assessment element can be seen from both ends of the education journey; an important point often overlooked is a proper "assessment of need" before learning even starts. The assessment of learning should ideally see the same customisation that is really required on the pedagogical side. If rubric design concentrates solely on how to assess learning without taking into account *who* is learning and in what way, potential will be lost to measure or assess in the best possible way. The difficulty, of course, in most learning environments is how to include this factor before a person has even entered the learning environment. This flows back to an accurate assessment of need, which if done either before or in tandem with rubric design may lead to a better outcome at the end of the cycle.

Learning should be an evolving process that would ideally adapt to conditions as it moves through parts of the cycle. Not including the elements of teaching and assessment in this process of adaptation would put the entire learning cycle at a distinct disadvantage.

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Institutes of Education need to design the curriculum with these principles in mind, promote good instructional design and provide access to flexible learning resources.

In order to create genuine UDL learning environment, many components must be involved:

- Flexible instructional practices;
- Learner-centred curriculum,
- Availability of digital learning resources;
- Support from educational leaders.

Understanding UDL can help teachers, lecturers, instructors and other educational leaders to talk about inclusion, technology and student success with students, staff, families and community partners. This framework can help learning coaches help teachers better understand the diverse learning needs of their students. The principles of UDL can also help inform future curriculum development to ensure learning outcomes, understanding goals, resources and assessments better meet the needs of a wider range of students. A UDL design approach will benefit all students. It can increase student engagement, help teachers better support each and every one of their students, and enhance academic success. We need to build a shared understanding for supporting every student. The technological era has arrived and is here to stay. We need to use it to bring every student along with us, and leave no student behind.

[1] D. Rose, 'Universal Design for Learning', *J. Spec. Educ. Technol.*, vol. 16, pp. 66–67, Mar. 2001, doi: 10.1177/016264340101600208.

[2] 'The Expert Learner Project: A UDL Success Story | The Inclusion Lab'. <https://blog.brookespublishing.com/the-expert-learner-project-a-udl-success-story/> (accessed Nov. 14, 2020).

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Digital Developments

Online learning has become increasingly popular in recent years, especially given the current pandemic. A result of online learning is open book exams. Invigilators can't stop people from looking at the material because they are no longer in front of them. While it has been argued that people aren't learning anything now, this may actually have the opposite effect (Green et al, 2016). Exams have previously required the ability to retain bits of information for short periods of time. Now that the information is in front of you, this has to change. It allows for more complex questions in exams that require you to not only know the material, but also understand it. This is essentially knowledge, but can it be enhanced by digital tools?

Going beyond what is traditionally taught in schools, the use of digital tools can, as Robinson says, create new circumstances for deeper learning. (Robinson, 2010, 4:20). Life-long skills can be taught such as CV creation, coding and graphic design through the use of computers, laptops and tablets. Apps and services on computing devices can be used to enhance the learning experience. For example, Google Docs enables collaborative writing and learning, SimpleMind allows you to create mind maps and Duolingo assists with language learning. Tools such as Canvas can revolutionize the way students obtain notes and how homework is submitted within secondary schools, as it is practiced at university level. Another tool that can be used in the classroom is video gaming.

Dr Kurt Squire, a professor from the University of California and former Director of the Games, Learning & Society Initiative, is a massive advocate of introducing Video Games into the learning curriculum. Squire believes that the playing of a game enables the intellectual and social growth of the participant over the long term and "permeates into his or her learning repertoire" (Squire, 2011). The way to assess if a Video Game is a good educational tool is to ascertain how engaged the student is. This is because the engagement of the student means that they will be excited, will interact with the game, problem solve and learn simultaneously.

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[3] C. A. Ferrante, 'A CASE STUDY OF INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY: A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH USING THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY', p. 477.

Andrew

Thoughts on Learning:

Knowledge and learning are intertwined with each other. Knowledge is the remembering of facts and information, the understanding of a subject and gaining skills to use in life. Learning is the professional process of gaining knowledge and experience, through things like attending school. The goal of learning is to obtain knowledge and experience.

There are different theories as to how we gain knowledge, or the best method of obtaining knowledge. Empiricism argues that knowledge is gained through sensory experiences. Rationalism argues that knowledge is gathered independent from our senses and is based on reason. Then there is induction vs deduction. Induction is taking a specific idea and coming to a broad conclusion, while deduction is taking a broad idea and coming to a specific conclusion.

I am not sure which of these lead to the best learning experience i.e. the most amount of knowledge gained. As a pragmatist, I think it comes down to the specific situation, such as what is trying to be taught and who is it being taught to. But there are certain topics that are better learned through different philosophies.

What I want to look at is how we can use technology within learning environments like schools to give the best learning experience and which type of gaining knowledge is enhanced the most by said tech.

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Squire says that in order to support the development of *good* educational games, there must be collaboration between designers and educators. In addition, quality games should include entertaining and academically accurate material, be both fun and insightful and have a certain amount of sophistication. The games should also provide social networks and group interactions while piquing interests and inspiring creativity. If this type of game-based learning was to be used, online discussion practice would be of benefit to this framework, synergistically speaking.

Conclusion

So, learning has indeed grown up, but the question remains - have we? Have our methods, environments, pedagogies and practices matured? Our aim was to reconsider traditions within educational models, knowledge that is deductively transmitted, tutor led, and somewhat deficient in elements like student activity, collaboration and creativity. In our efforts to tackle challenges like inactivity and diversity, we analysed collaborative learning, considered UDL approaches, assessment customisation, and encouraged the usage of digital led innovations like gaming within the learning environment. The future needs to put forward a better way to break down potential barriers, foster more personalisation, and ensure that no student is left behind. As Abraham Lincoln reminds us - "*The best way to predict your future is to create it.*"

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A few things come to mind:

- The tools available on computers, laptops and tablets create so many opportunities for learning. One of the best things I learned in school was in fourth year when we would have computer labs. We were taught a bit of coding, poster making and created CVs. It opens up new opportunities. I think the classroom needs to be modernised.
- Homework becoming digital. We have a great system in place with Canvas and it could easily be implemented to secondary schools. It saves on paper and allows for automatic correcting of quizzes and therefore saves time. The entire canvas system of submitting work and receiving notes would be so handy. Of course there are the downsides of people without stable internet connections not being able to utilise this.
- Technology like interactive whiteboards can benefit the learning environment. Projectors for computers have become the standard, and I can imagine this being the next step.
- Online learning has become very popular in recent years (we're doing it right now!). Before covid, there were a variety of courses you could take online that would be certified. Even the DH department created the first online only masters in UCC. This brings into question the benefits of physical vs online learning. We have already talked about this in discussions and could expand upon it further.

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- Forced online learning has led to open book exams. You can't stop people from looking at the material because they are not in front of you. While this has been argued that now people aren't learning anything, I think it opens up new ways to learn. Exams have previously required the ability to retain bits of information for short periods of time. But now the information is in front of you, so that had to change. It allows for more complex questions that require you to not only know the material, but to understand it. That to me is knowledge.
- A medium that would be very beneficial for learning is games. I have experienced games in education even back in primary school with those cool maths games. Games like Minecraft have an "Education Edition" that expand what learning can be. It forces interaction and therefore attention. Also, I just really love video games.
- Lastly, virtual reality and augmented reality when implanted would enhance the learning experience to new heights. I could go on for hours about the potentials of these technologies in education, let alone in general. These technologies are very beneficial to empirical and deductive learning. Virtual reality in education is like games in education but times 10 because of the immersion. And augmented reality allows for you to see something as if it were right in front of you (if you haven't, I would highly recommend looking up the Microsoft Hololens).

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Miscellany at the End of the Road

Reasons to Believe

I get the passion in the Morris piece and it gets to the whole point of education (not just university education either). I chose this course because it was a master's degree, it is (mainly) online and it interested me, probably in that order; I'd recently decided that finishing with a BA is not helping me career-wise. There will always be practical things in life getting in the way though, surely? If I just wanted to fill in the blank where a master's degree should be for professional gain I would have done one in public administration, like most of my civil service colleagues. I didn't because I'm not really interested in it and it would have *purely* been for professional reasons, so the fact that I went back to humanities is good, right? But is it enough?

I've been out of education for 20 years and it's given me some perspective on what I experienced versus what I'm experiencing now. For whatever reasons, this course has some really diverse participants, but it's not truly *diverse* in the technical sense. But it's still more diverse than some of my undergraduate

modules were, populated by people of the same age and, for the most part, similar backgrounds. Morris's idea of community is important here too; the creative tension between diversity and community can be a volatile substance. Interestingly, the "networked scholars" spoken of by Wellman et al. will probably bypass some of the constraints of in-person collaboration (particularly with respect to "diversity") but this is unlikely to be a silver bullet simply because the modes of online collaboration can be volatile in themselves. Personally, I think it's foolish to use digital tools merely to replicate what happens in the real world; the hardest part might be breaking out of a habit and using these tools in a truly innovative way. Others made suggestions here but it won't be simple; universities have been around for centuries and our system of learning is almost cast in iron; to truly change, we will need buy-in from society as a whole and not just those who want to be directly involved, or participating, in education.

Finding Community

From Us to Ours

I should begin by saying I work every day in a collaborative environment, as my work involves putting together one large document every day, with 40 or so reporters involved with the process, along with editors and administration staff. This is an advantage in so much as I am quite used to the give-and-take inherent in collaboration; I'm so used to it that it's almost imperceptible to me. I realised with the group I worked with that this *skill, I suppose (?)* is not something that can simply be added to person's toolkit and it is something that needs to be mastered in the right environment. I guess this links to the initial lessons of this course, that of tribes and crowdsourcing, and the common interests of both, which may exist but can only survive to improve through a fostering of community. In reality, such camaraderie can only be fostered by a common purpose too, so it helped that although I'm sure my group was very interested in producing a document about *learning*, each of its members was equally if not more interested in trying to get a good grade in the module. That said, a common purpose can only be a starting point rather than a means to an end; it is imperative the ultimate goal of such a group seeking to foster a community of practice does not drown the interpersonal dynamics.

"It is imperative the ultimate goal of such a group, seeking to foster a community of practice, does not drown the interpersonal dynamics."

There is some luck involved too, I suppose. The group I was involved with displayed an admirable lack of ego. It is inevitable with groups that personalities emerge and sometimes they can lead to personalities overpowering a group, even in an unintentional manner. In the professional context, this may be a requirement, as a manager may be required to lead or direct a group's work. This can come at the cost of true and democratic collaboration, although in most professional contexts this may be a trade-off considered worthwhile.

Digital Tools, Analogue People

It is worth noting the different digital tools used for different elements of the community of practice. The group, in the main, used:

- the Canvas VLE, including group collaboration and discussion board features
- the Google Docs office suite, mainly collaborative word processing
- the Microsoft 365 office suite (mainly MS Teams for video calls and threaded discussion on a more formal note, along with limited use of MS Word
- WhatsApp messaging

FINDING COMMUNITY

The aim of the group was to produce a document on learning, and the writing happened exclusively on the Google Docs platform, with some limited rough work done through MS Word and accessible through Teams and Canvas. Logistics and organisational processes occurred through Canvas and Teams, with some limited examples on WhatsApp. However, WhatsApp was mainly used as a less formal forum on which to prompt work if other methods were not *immediate* enough, discuss work in a light-hearted manner or offer encouragement. It is interesting that the further away the group got from the actual work forum (Google Docs), even in a virtual sense, the less formal the interaction was.

This is no accident and indeed it demonstrates a significant characteristic of a properly functioning community of practice. There should be a proper forum for each element of the group dynamic but it is not something that can necessarily be prescribed - group interaction on WhatsApp may work well for some but it may be anathema for others. Indeed, part of the foundational work of a community of practice should be finding out how to best allow the flow of ideas or discussion between group members. This is something that may be overlooked (or dispensed with completely in the case of some online communities, as the medium is the message) but it seems to me to be essential for true collaboration.

The team dynamic was completely online (owing to current circumstances) but it is hard to gauge if having met in person would have changed how the group worked. It should be considered that people can adopt an online persona, whether intention or not. The in-person persona of group members, and as a result the community fostered online, cannot be taken for granted. However, it has been my experience that the fostering of relationships online can be more difficult than in person, usually because civilising social norms remain intact in the real world where they may become brittle and shatter online.

Final Thoughts

Although it may be a statement of the obvious, fostering a group community of practice is hugely dependent on group members and their intentions. We had a group with a common purpose that we looked to achieve through collaboration and mutual respect. Although it worked for us (and with little or no friction - itself a problem if a group needs "creative tension"), it may not work for other groups, even when the other groups have most of the same people. It seems the fostering of a true community of practice is a delicate balancing act that probably needs constant adjustment. It is ironic, then, that the best examples of community of practice are those where the group members are completely relaxed and at ease with one another.