MOOC research about peer interaction

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The importance of peer interaction

- Peer interaction may be important in all learning; and must be more so with low staff:student ratios.
- But peer interaction (like technology use) is not all of one kind.
- How do we first classify, and then research, the diverse peer interactions of our learners?


#rhizo14: "The community is the curriculum"

- Different platforms for peer interaction were appropriated:
  - Blogs & microblogs
  - Forums
  - Collaborative editing
  - Audio/video chat
  - …
- None of these were part of the official platform.
- This usage was an emergent behaviour, and it became natural to use a mix of platforms

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Types of platform   (classification A)

Twitter	Short, public
Blogs	Longer, more considered, public; Assymetric; focussed on one learner's contribution.
Facebook group	Shortish, more private
Google Docs	Various privacy options

Example workflow
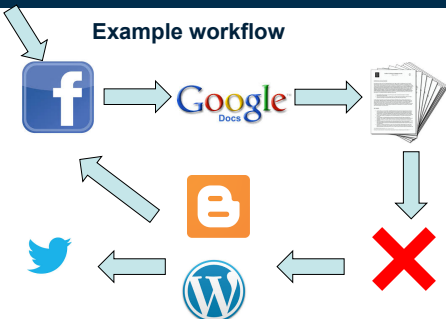
Example workflow (2)

- Begins as a comment/link posted in Facebook group
- Some of us decide to submit to a Journal/Conference, so set up a Google Doc
- Submit to Journal/Conference
- Receive Journal/Conference rejection
- Some of us write blog posts about some of the content
- Post/Tweet the links to blog posts to Twitter and Facebook
- Conversation about blog posts continue over Facebook

Learning is ambiguous w.r.t. public/private

- Changing audiences, changing privacies
- The actual present day web is ill suited to managing this.
- Nevertheless, a user wish (need?) is for fluent, fluid switching of the audience for a thing.

- The audience (privacy-setting) is not known at software-design time.
- The audience is not known when the first words are typed.
- The author's choice of audience often changes during the process of creation
- Typically while learning you go from public, to private, to public:
- So the change is not even one-directional.

How do we manage this?

- Apps are typically developed with one audience in mind and are not adaptable
- We typically don't know who our audience is before we start

  – Try to replicate all of the 3rd party software?
  – Ignore interactions outwith the "official" course?
  – Set up "official" 3rd party groups, hashtags etc.?
  – Ask learners to "register" their blogs etc.?
  – Appoint community leaders to help facilitate all of the media?
  – Use software to "scrape" results?

Classifying by common vs. complementary (reciprocal) benefits   (classification B1)

- Multiple types of peer interaction:
  – Discussion (joint activity, but different personal gains in understanding)
  – Collaboration on a joint product
  – Peer review/support (joint activity, different roles, both learn)

- Confident (life long) learners move fluidly and fluently between these types because they gain different things from each.

Classifying communication by its content type
(classification B2)

- Understanding concepts
- "Admin" discussions (where do I find X?): information about the learning process, not about the content itself.
- Reassurance (is it only me that feels that?) ≈ using social comparison to calibrate one's self-regulation.
- Naked social bonding
- Whingeing / venting (some hope of validation)
- Outpouring (shouting in an empty office): not really aimed at an audience response.

The neo-Vygotskian perspective as a test lens
(classification C)
This sees all learning as induction into a new kind of conversation by interacting with an expert. It assumes 1:1 interaction, and is inherently highly scaffolded.

- May be most needed when learners are new to a whole way of thinking, e.g. a new discipline.
- Could a MOOC cope with this?
- Perhaps: likely wide range of expertise in learner cohort, which means peer interaction might substitute for the parent/teacher role.
- But: course designers must ensure that such types of peer interaction and scaffolding will develop.

Summary: Different types of classification for peer interaction

1. By software platform
2. By the task/goal of the interaction:
   2a) Common vs. reciprocal benefits
   2b) Content type of the interaction
3. By how each peer interaction supports the process assumed by the neo-Vygotskian perspective (learning entirely by interaction)

Each type within each classification has different implications for researching peer interaction.