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WHY DID WE COLLABORATE? A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO MOOC

COLLABORATIONS

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Approval of Dissertation

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WHY DID WE COLLABORATE? A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS IN A DISTRIBUTED EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER WORKGROUP

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Acknowledgments

Sometime around May 2011, I walked off the elevator and onto the top floor of my campus's academic library. I was attending a graduation event for my department. I wasn't graduating that year, and I was not working for my department at the time; but I had friends who were graduating so I wanted to congratulate them. The last floor of the library was a really great venue for a graduation event. On the 11th floor you not only had a bird's eye view of the entire campus, but also of the bay and the city that lie just beyond the campus. Over the years it had become a space I used for classes, conferences, celebrations, and even contemplation.

As the graduation program was starting, Dr. Pepi Leistyna – one of my former professors, and later a colleague – took the podium to welcome the graduates, their families, friends, and esteemed colleagues. I don't remember the entire welcome speech, but there is a part that still stands out for me to this day. Pepi said something like "be grateful for the journey and those who you've met along the way because they've all contributed to the success you are experiencing today." Yes, this is really (really) paraphrased, but the gist was that you are who you are because of the people you met along the way and the contexts that defined your choices. I remember, for a brief moment, being taken aback when I heard this. *What do you mean, Pepi? Did someone else stay up late and study for me? Take the exams for me, and do my assignments? Nope! I earned this degree, man.* Again, perhaps this isn't exactly what I thought (I don't remember what it was, actually) – but it's what my gut felt. This was, of course, *because* of the contexts that had shaped my experiences in the preceding few years. I heard the words, but I missed the message.

Fast forward to 2021. I am a little older, and perhaps a little wiser (only time will tell on the second one). I've come to appreciate those words over the past ten years, and I've come to

see the truth in them. While it is true that this research is *my* work, and I am the one who put it all together, reached out to potential participants, collected narratives, worked on the analysis, and wrote up the manuscript – and ultimately it was *my* job to successfully defend it – it was **not** a solo endeavor. If I were to list everyone in the credits section of this document, the credits list would probably rival any Marvel or Star Wars movie credit roll. The story that culminates in this dissertation started a long time ago, with interactions with many people, and across many places, and contexts.

Some characters provided context and actions that were passive in nature, stuff that happens in the background, like my grandparents's, my dad's, and my mom's pursuits of lifelong learning. Each one of these lifelong learning pursuits took a different form, but each was valuable in its own way. Learning was never imposed, but anyone who paid attention could see that thread of lifelong learning being ever-present. Some characters and contexts were rather active, like high school teachers who recognized a spark of curiosity and nurtured it; or college professors who looked you up, *after they had retired*, so that they could snail mail you an article that might be of interest. There are those friends you meet along the way in a cMOOC (or two, or three…) who nurtured your development, both as an academic and as a caring educator; those cohort-mates who cheered you on, and there is my wife (Kristin) who has always poked me to think critically and expanded my thinking in diverse ways. There are those friends and colleagues who see something that you might be interested in and send you a message about it; and, of course, your dissertation co-chairs (Dr. Aga and Dr. Cynthia) who've read and commented on all of your work-in-progress. There are also people who were not a positive influence, ranging from non-venomous Ophidians who "harshed your mellow" (to quote Pauley Shore), to those who dripped venom. Despite the toxic effects that those characters and their

contexts may provide, they nevertheless provide pivotal moments for personal growth and learning. So… thinking back to Pepi's welcome address: Yes! The journey and the people I've met along the way do define this moment. It took a little while (and a few more people and contexts) to see it, but as Dathon said to Captain Picard, "Sokath, his eyes uncovered." Finally, here are some specific special thanks (that don't fit into a narrative form):

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of working together in a distributed educational researcher workgroup. Using narrative inquiry this research explored the experiences of four educational researchers who were learner-participants in specific connectivist MOOCs on the topic of Rhizomatic Learning conducted in 2014 and 2015. These educational researchers, during this time, also banded together to form workgroups in which they researched different aspects of the MOOC experience. Prior research suggests that such self-organizing working groups are to be expected in (connectivist) MOOC environments; however, the last decade of MOOC research has yet to examine this strand of MOOC participant behaviors. My research project returns to those original connectivist MOOC roots. A better understanding of why the individuals in the MOOCs formed workgroups and worked together on self-initiated projects when the MOOCs did not require them to, provides a variety of insights into experiences that were treasured by the participants and that were transformative in nature. This research adds to the literature on connectivist MOOCs and participant behaviors in Rhizomatic MOOCs. It also provides insights to traditional online course designers and instructors on how they might promote collaboration amongst learners, and how to encourage learners to form workgroups that meet their learning needs. The results of this research study suggest that while there are numerous factors that contribute to learner-learner collaboration, the spark that ignited the collaborative endeavors came from the environment, varying participant interests, and personal curiosities. An inquiry space that was conducive to such collaboration provided participants with easy entry and exit points and included tools that facilitated group workflows. Once groups started to form, a sense of being together with others socially, as well as an enjoyment of learning, were what fueled interest in continuing to be part of such collaboratives. The existence

of "catalysts" helped in maintaining momentum so that teams reached natural punctuation points

(i.e., deliverables, research papers) to their collaborations. Once participants were at a

collaboration punctuation point, they could choose to reform into different group configurations,

examining other curiosities of mutual interest, or adjourning and moving onto something

different.

Keywords: Collaboration, MOOC, cMOOC, Narrative Inquiry, Rhizo14, Rhizo15,

Collaborative Research, Rhizomatic Learning

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Field Text: Field text is a term used in narrative inquiry. In most other methods, field

texts are referred to as data. Field texts are composed from conversations,

interviews, and participant observations, as well as from artefacts such as artwork,

photographs, and other documents. Field texts are co-compositions that reflect

both the researcher of the narrative inquiry as well as the participants (Clandinin

& Caine, 2008).

Interim Text: Interim text is a term used in narrative inquiry. Interim texts are created

from field texts as the researcher begins to interpret field texts. Interim texts are

often partial texts that are open to interpretation. This allows participants and

researchers to continue to engage in co-composition of interpretations and to

continue to negotiate the multiplicity of possible meanings (Clandinin & Huber,

2010).

Justification: Justification is a means of addressing the benefit of a particular research

study. In a narrative inquiry there are three different types of justification:

personal, practical, and social (Clandinin, 2013).

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC): The term MOOC was coined in 2008 by Cormier

to describe a new kind of instructor-led online course that was open and available

for free (Cormier, 2010). This original variant of MOOC has since been labeled a

connectivist MOOC, or cMOOC (Rodriguez, 2012) to distinguish the original

format from other MOOC formats that subsequently evolved.

Mini Research Puzzle: See Research Puzzle in this section.

Narrative Inquiry: Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method, within the broader

    category of research into narratives, that was developed by Jean Clandinin and

    Michael Connelly. Narrative inquiry is a pragmatic research method that

    considers lived experiences to be a storied phenomenon. These storied phenomena

    have four parts: living, telling, retelling, and reliving. Narrative inquiry involves

    collaboration between the researcher and the researched. Narrative inquiry "is

    first and foremost a way of understanding experience" (Given, 2008, p. 541).

Personal Justification: One of the three types of justification in a narrative inquiry.

    Personal justification details why this research study is important to the researcher

    (Clandinin, 2013). Personal justification is often only briefly described in

    published narrative inquiries with the exception of theses and dissertations; theses

    and dissertations typically include a more detailed personal justification for the

    inquiry (Clandinin & Huber, 2008).

Practical Justification: One of the three types of justification in a narrative inquiry. The

    practical justification is where researchers pay special notice to the importance of

    the possibility of shifting or changing practice based on the findings of their

    research (Clandinin & Huber, 2008).

Research Puzzle: The term research puzzle is used by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in

    lieu of the term research question. Clandinin and Connelly use this term to signal

    one of the methodological differences that exist between narrative inquiry and

    other research methods. Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 provide additional details. For

    this research proposal, I also use the term Mini Research Puzzle to denote

    something analogous to a sub-question typically found in theses and dissertations.

Research Texts: Research texts is the term used in narrative inquiry to address the

findings of the research. They are the progression of texts which start from field

texts, evolve into interim texts, and culminate in research texts. Research texts

develop from the repeated asking of questions about the significance of the

research (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Research texts address the three justifications

and they are negotiated between researcher and participants.

Restorying: Restorying is the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key

elements of the story, such as time, place, and plot, and then rewriting the story to

place it within a chronological sequence (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Participant stories, when collected as field texts, may be disjointed and details

may exist across a variety of field texts. When a researcher restories a

participant's story, they add rich details from their collected field texts and

arrange the story so that it is logically sequenced.

Social Justification: One of the three types of justification in a narrative inquiry. This

justification concerns the "*so what?*" aspects of the narrative research. Social

justification can be thought of in two ways: a theoretical justification and a social

action justification (Clandinin & Huber 2008). Theoretical justifications are used

in research work to demonstrate the merit of contributing new knowledge, or

methodological approaches, to the field (Clandinin, 2013); whereas social action

justifications make visible and actionable, aspects of everyday life that may have

been invisible in the past.

Working Together, Workgroup, and Work Product: These terms are used to denote a

process, a group of people, and an outcome. The terms connote what oftentimes is

called *collaboration*; however, the term *collaboration* is problematic because it

has both a precise meaning (e.g., in the research literature) and an imprecise

meaning (e.g., a dictionary or everyday definition, wherein the term is used

interchangeably with the term *cooperation*). To avoid ambiguities, this text uses

the term *working together*, and the associated terms that flow from it, to replace

the terms *collaboration* and *cooperation*. The terms *collaboration* and

cooperation will be used only as necessary in reports, including in the data

collection and analysis, in which cases the terms will be italicized. Additional

information about *collaboration* and *cooperation* is available in Chapter 2

(literature review).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Prelude: A Working Together Story

My interest in "collaborative" work in an open education environment started in 2011 with a discussion forum post in the third Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in which I participated. Notwithstanding formal definitions that exist for the word, *collaborative*, I use the term here to acknowledge that our team described what we did and how we worked, as such, though I enclose the word in quotation marks to recognize the term as imprecise and therefore problematic. I also use the word *team* intentionally because we self-identified our workgroup as a "Research Team."

The MOOC that brought our team together was called the MobiMOOC, an early MOOC of the type that later became known as a cMOOC (Rodriguez, 2012). Thus, our workgroup name was the "MobiMOOC Research Team," or MRT. MobiMOOC centered on the topic of mobile learning. During the MOOC, the organizer posted an open call for participative research, noting that she had received a recommendation to write an academic paper about our MobiMOOC for an upcoming international conference on mobile learning. She did not wish to prepare the paper alone, so instead invited anyone who was interested in contributing to the paper to be a participant in the project. It was a call for shared inquiry among a community of learners. Ultimately, seven individuals joined this project and collaborated on MobiMOOC-related research in the year following the MobiMOOC. I participated as one of the seven researchers.

This MOOC's organizer called for research participation, one small posting among several hundred discussion forum posts in an open educational environment, has had an enormous impact on how I have come to view group work, and how I view

working together with people who begin as strangers. Prior to this experience, I had done

my best to avoid what was termed "group work" in my courses. This was true both in my

distance learning courses and for courses that I took face-to-face. My previous,

educationally-focused group work assignments had yielded mixed results. The

deliverables met the predefined educational objectives. However, the process of working

together often left me unsatisfied. At best there was always something that grated on

some group member's nerves, and at worst the entire process felt like an unnecessary

chore. Compared to these previous experiences, my experiences of working together

during the MobiMOOC opportunity seemed different and I was eager to become

involved.

   Ultimately, our team published in a peer-reviewed academic journal (e.g., de

Waard et al., 2011a) and presented at an international conference (e.g., de Waard et al.,

2011b). We produced work that won one of the "Best Full Paper" awards for that

conference - an award that kept me motivated to work together with others on other

research projects. After this initial collaboration, different combinations of people from

the original team worked together on several other projects, which resulted in works

published in both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed publications (e.g., de Waard,

Keskin, & Koutropoulos, 2014; Keskin et al., 2018; Koutropoulos & Hogue, 2012).

   After we had completed a handful of research papers together as a team, one of

our members posed the question *"Why do we collaborate?"* We started to explore this

question in the MRT, working in a dialogic manner to explore the problematics of our

own collaboration. However, our team members ultimately went our own ways, perhaps

losing interest due in part to the fact that this topic of inquiry was not related to MOOCs

which, along with mobile learning, initially was what had brought us together in the

MobiMOOC course. Hence, we did not pursue to completion what for me remains a key

inward-looking inquiry. In my mind, the question remained: *Why did we collaborate?*

Background to the Study

　　　　In May of 2014 and in January of 2015, Cormier, the person who coined the term

MOOC (Cormier, 2010), initiated and facilitated two MOOCs on Rhizomatic Learning

(2014a, 2014b, 2015). The course that Cormier offered was formally titled "Rhizomatic

Learning – The community is the curriculum." Cormier (2014a) notes that he originally

intended to offer a six-week open course through the Peer2Peer University platform

(p2pu.org) to host short conversations about his work on Rhizomatic Learning. The two

MOOCs have since come to be informally known by the hashtags #rhizo14 and #rhizo15

respectively. These hashtags were used on various social media platforms to identify

posts directed toward the community. Much as MobiMOOC had done a few years prior,

the Rhizo MOOCs served as the nexus that brought together MOOC participants. Some

of the MOOC participants then went above and beyond the limited scope of MOOC

activities, forming groups that worked together to research, publish, and present on topics

of mutual interest. I was a participant-learner in both Rhizo14 and Rhizo15 but also

participated as a group member in a few of the research partnerships that evolved from

the Rhizo MOOCs.

　　　　In the context of Rhizo-initiated team research work, the question originally posed

as part of the MRT's collaborations -- *"Why do we collaborate?"* -- suddenly moved

back to the forefront of my mind. It was prompted by what I was experiencing as a

participant in the teams that emerged from our common engagement in the Rhizomatic

Learning MOOC (Rhizo MOOC). The experiences of Rhizo14 and Rhizo15 team

participants now provide the opportunity to explore the question of why we collaborate.

Problem Statement

      I have observed cases in which self-selecting participants in a MOOC will form or

join working teams. These teams are not an intended part of the pedagogical design of the

MOOC but rather are unanticipated outgrowths of the MOOC that emerge spontaneously

among individuals seeking to pursue a common group endeavor. Such instances of self-

regulated groups working together spontaneously were predicted in the early MOOC

literature, in writings such as those of McAuley, Stewart, Siemens, and Cormier (2010),

but have remained unexplored to date. My own experiences in these workgroups, both in

MobiMOOC and in the Rhizo MOOCs, caused me to conclude that these workgroups

form spontaneously and exhibit resilience in that they overcome obstacles to reach their

goals. Ultimately, I deem the overall experience of working together to have been

positive. Do others who participated in such workgroups have similar experiences and

recollections? Do they have similar perceptions of the origin and nature of workgroups?

      Over the last decade of MOOC offerings, there has been research on various

aspects of MOOCs; however, this phenomenon of MOOC-adjacent activity has not been

explored. My goal in this narrative inquiry was to look deeply at the experiences that

teammates and I shared when working together on self-initiated MOOC-adjacent

activities. The overall aim of this research was to answer the question "Why did we

collaborate?".

Research Puzzle

Narrative inquiry, as put forth by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), differs from other research methods in a variety of ways, including departing from common core terminology common to other methods (see Terms Used, and Chapter 3 for more details). Whereas other methods, and by extension the traditional doctoral dissertation, use the term "research question," for narrative inquiry Clandinin and Connelly (2000) rephrase this key concept as the "research puzzle" (p. 124), a term which I adopt in this work. This strategic use of differing terms matters deeply: The very phrase "research puzzle" draws attention to the premise that "narrative inquiry is composed around a particular wonder, and, [that] rather than thinking about framing a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 42), the narrative inquirer frames a research puzzle that brings with it a "sense of a search, a 're-search,' a searching again" and "a sense of continual reformulation" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). This way of thinking about the subject under investigation has parallel implications for the way the puzzle is researched: researched through stories. Just as the research puzzle is searched again through the research process, so too are plotlines to stories continually revised throughout the narrative inquiry research process.

My research puzzle is:

Why did we collaborate, and have since worked on research projects, as a result of our participation in the Rhizo MOOCs?

Narrative inquiry is described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as a research method involving "a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p. 20). Due to the

collaborative nature of this method, answers to my research puzzle, necessarily, were expected to vary depending on the cycle of ebbs and flows of collaboration that occurred between the research participants and me. So as to take full advantage of the fluidity afforded by, and required for, narrative inquiry, I identified three mini-puzzles that I wanted to explore. My three mini-puzzles were as follows:

- What brought us together to pursue our common interests? (MP1)

- How do we, as participants, view the process of working together? (MP2)

- What sorts of formative moments indicated major breakthroughs in our working together, or signaled a transformation of the existing working partnership? (MP3)

These three mini-puzzles came both from my own initial reflections on working together within these Rhizo-groups, as well as from questions regarding collaborations that members of the MRT posed to ourselves during MobiMOOC. These three questions loosely follow Tuckman's stages of group development (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). The intent was to explore the *why* through the beginning, middle, and end. The beginning was explored via MP1 (Tuckman's forming and storming phases), the middle of the collaboration via MP2 (Tuckman's storming, norming, and performing), and the end via MP3 (Tuckman's adjourning). Tuckman is explored further in Chapter 2.

Research Participants

Fifteen individuals comprised the sample pool for this study. These individuals met the following inclusion criteria:

a) were enrolled participants of either Rhizo14 or Rhizo15 MOOC or both,

b) formed or joined working groups during or after the MOOCs,

c) produced academic work products (e.g., academic papers, conference papers, etc.) that were not MOOC "homework," but rather group-negotiated products of mutual interest and mutual inquiry, and

d) are named authors of the aforementioned works.

My plan called for contacting all 15 individuals and inviting them to participate in the study. From the number of people who opted into the study, I selected the first four individuals who responded affirmatively to join me in this study and be my storytellers. Creswell (2007) indicates that narrative inquiry focuses on one or two individuals; however, as the research progressed it was evident that additional storytellers would be required. The rationale behind this is explored further in Chapter 3. From my interactions, both in the Rhizo MOOCs and in the workgroups that formed, I already knew all 15 potential participants and enjoyed different degrees of rapport with each one of them. This is important because narrative inquiry is research done *with* people and not *on* people. Therefore, the specific participant-researcher relationship matters greatly in terms of how a narrative inquiry unfolds. There was also one exclusion criterion: If at the time this project moved into the field text collection phase and I was actively working on a project with any of those aforementioned individuals, I would not consider them as a viable participant. While the ethics of a narrative inquiry are relational (Clandinin, 2013) this degree of interweaving between me (the researcher) and those participants could have posed issues for what might be considered proper in the context of a doctoral dissertation.

Importance of the Study

Clandinin (2013) writes that narrative inquiry acknowledges three valid justifications for conducting a study: a personal justification, a practical justification, and a social, or theoretical, justification. This section describes these three justifications as they apply to my research.

Practical Justification. Practical justification refers to why the research puzzle matters for practice in the relevant field(s). From a practical perspective, I approached this research puzzle through the lens of a course designer and course instructor. To address the issue of engagement in distance learning, both within specific course communities and among cohorts of learners, we require a better understanding of why individuals team up, and what works for individuals in their workgroups. As I narrated in my opening story, I avoided group work in class, but over the course of my participation in such MOOC-adjacent groups my views have changed. I believe that gaining a greater understanding of successful workgroups will enable us to support and nurture workgroups among learners both in distance education programs and in open educational environments. Such understandings might also enable us to support emergent inquiry from learners, a potentially beneficial outcome of practical significance to future MOOC designs. The findings of this research could also inform the development of frameworks and design principles for online collaborative spaces.

Social Justification. The social, or theoretical, justification pertains to the "difference this research might make to theoretical understanding or to making situations more socially just" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 35). When McAuley et al. (2010) first wrote about the MOOC model for digital practice, these authors predicted the phenomenon of

having collaborations that extended beyond the MOOC itself. Despite the extensive body

of research assembled since those first MOOCs, very little attention has been paid to

side-project collaborations that evolve among MOOC participants. Close examination of

the experiences of individuals who were part of such "collaboration [which] may extend

far beyond the MOOC itself" (McAuley et al., 2010, p. 5) contributes to theoretical

understandings evolving in the research literature, adding to our collective understanding

of this phenomenon. McAuley et al. (2010) posit that "the network negotiated is just as

important as the topic covered, if not more so" (p. 5); the narrative exploration of

participant's stories comprising this research tests the validity of this initial positioning.

  Personal Justification. As I narrated in the prelude of this chapter, I participated

as a member of a team that was composed of members of a MOOC who had been

strangers to one another prior to self-organizing into their collaborative groups. Even

though we had no prior rapport, in my view, we worked together effectively to produce

academic work relating to our mutual interests, spurred on by our mutual participation in

the MOOC. We also began to look introspectively at our own group to discover why we

were collaborating, an aspect of our group work that group members ultimately did not

pursue to completion. When Rhizo14 and Rhizo15 provided a new opportunity to work

together with other people, under similar circumstances, I answered the call as did others.

Personal curiosity drove me to seek answers to why we collaborated.

Research Study Organization

  This narrative inquiry research is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1, the

current chapter, introduces the subject I studied, as well as provides an overview of the

research puzzle, the background, and the justifications for the study.

As noted, the components of a narrative inquiry differ from the components to be expected in a conventional doctoral dissertation. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge this "tension" (p. 41). They note that their own graduate students "frequently write dissertations without a specific literature review chapter. They weave the literature throughout the dissertation from beginning to end in an attempt to create a seamless link between the theory and the practice embodied in inquiry" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41).

In my literature review, I trod a middle ground between the methodological particularities of narrative inquiry and the norms of doctoral dissertation formatting. Specifically, I provided an introduction that frames the subject through a brief literature review. I subsequently wove the literature throughout the findings. Chapter 2 provides this brief literature review, touching upon two broad areas. The first area focuses on the topic of MOOCs, paying specific attention to course designs, and their philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings. This focus is important because it helps us understand the medium through which members of the workgroups met and initially interacted; moreover, MOOCs are also the medium that workgroup members researched. The second area of focus addresses the two concepts of working together, namely collaboration and cooperation. As part of my discussion of this second area, I addressed focal topics regarding the process of working together, as well as some contexts for participating in collaborative work.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodological approach that governed this narrative inquiry. I introduce narrative inquiry as a method, describe participant recruitment, discuss field text collection, and the iterative search and *re-search* process of going from

field texts to research texts in this narrative inquiry, as well as the limitations and ethical considerations of this research.

Chapter 4 is a fictionalized account of a participant taking part in a future Rhizomatic Learning course (Rhizo24). It explores the subject of why some of these participants collaborated with one another through the eyes of a new Rhizo MOOC participant. This chapter is the first Research Text in this dissertation that presents findings through narrative.

Chapter 5 is the second Research Text of this research. This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the narrative in Chapter 4 and reports on findings through a more formal presentation lens. Chapter 5 also pulls out the storytellers from Chapter 4 and explores them individually, in addition to being explored as part of the narrative in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes this research by providing a summary as well as future research directions. Chapter 6 is presented as a follow-up to Chapter 4. It follows the same protagonist as she returns to her home learning environment after Rhizo24. Through the fictionalized account, she explores future directions in Rhizo-research as she decides what subjects to research for her own dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I briefly explore two facets of the research literature that are connected thematically to this narrative inquiry. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, typically a narrative inquiry does not include a separate literature review chapter, but rather incorporates findings from the research literature within the narrative throughout various stages of the research writing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, since the requirements of a typical dissertation call for the inclusion of a literature review, in this chapter, I provide a compromise between the two positions in which I review three elements of my mini research puzzles.

The first element of my research puzzle involves the MOOC itself since the MOOC gave rise to the workgroups. Within the MOOC examination, I narrate a little about the origins of the MOOC, providing key foundational characteristics of the MOOC variant MOOC termed the constructivist MOOC (cMOOC). The second element I examine are modes of working together, namely aspects of what are termed *collaboration* and *cooperation*. Combined, these two elements discussed in this chapter, provide the foundation upon which I later incorporate other research findings into the research texts. In narrative inquiry, research texts play a role roughly equivalent to the *findings* sections of more traditional research methods write-ups (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and it is the research text section where research literature is often woven into a narrative inquiry.

Massive Open Online Courses

Since the coining of the term MOOC, there has been public interest in what MOOCs are, who MOOC learners are, and what MOOCs can do for (or might do *to)*

higher education. There are various strands of research encompassing both qualitative

and quantitative methodologies, examining the human components of MOOCs, the

machine components, and the interaction between these two components. There is a

substantial body of research on MOOCs, including research on each of the following

areas of investigation:

1. researching MOOC learner demographics (e.g., Christiensen et al., 2013;
    Davis et al., 2014; Despujol, Turro, Busqueis, & Canero, 2014; Dillahunt,
    Wang, & Teasley, 2014; Ding et al., 2014; Ho et al., 2014; Ho et al., 2015;
    Shah, 2017; Watson, Watson, Alamri, & Mueller, 2017),

2. researching MOOC learner motivations and participation levels (e.g., Bonk &
    Lee, 2017; de Waard et al., 2011a; Eriksson, Adawi, & Stohr, 2017;
    Henderikx, Kreijns, & Kalz, 2017; Milligan, Littlejohn, & Margaryan, 2013;
    Milligan & Littlejohn, 2017),

3. examining MOOC learner drop-out (e.g., Hone & El Said, 2016; Yang, Sihna,
    Adamson, & Rose, 2013),

4. using machine learning to model emerging MOOC social networks (e.g.,
    Yang, Wen, Kumar, Zing, & Rose, 2014),

5. integrating machine translation into MOOCs (e.g., Castilho, Gaspari,
    Moorkens, & Way, 2017; Sennrich et al., 2017),

6. examining methods for assessing learners in MOOCs through peer or
    automated essay approaches (e.g., Balfour, 2013; Reilly, Stafford, Williams, &
    Corliss, 2014),

7. examining through meta-analyses current research in the MOOC area, as well as identifying emerging issues based on those analyses (e.g., Koutropoulos & Zaharias, 2015; Liyanagunawardena, Adams, & Williams, 2013; Trehan, Sanzgiri, Wang, & Joshi, 2017; Veletsianos & Shepherdson, 2016; Yuan & Powell, 2013), and

8. designing, developing, and exploring the nuances of newer MOOC designs, such as the dual-layer MOOC, the iMOOC, the LMOOC, the SMOOC, and the diffMOOC (e.g., Cleveland-Innes, Wilton, Ostashewski, & Parker, 2016; Cleveland-Innes, Gauvreau, Richardson, Mishra, & Ostashewski, 2019; Miyazoe, 2017; Ostashewski & Reid, 2012; Ostashewski, Cleveland-Innes, & Wilton, 2029; Rosé et al., 2015; Tahiri, Bennani, & Idrissi, 2017).

However, much of this published research falls outside the scope of my research and by extension this literature review. My literature review explores the history of MOOCs and MOOC designs, which help account for the role MOOCs play as a nexus point for the formation of workgroups and as the initial impulse for members of workgroups to begin working together.

A Brief History of the MOOC. MOOC is an acronym that was coined in 2008 by Cormier to describe a specific course offered by Siemens and Downes at the University of Manitoba. The course was titled *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge* (CCK). MOOC stands for Massive Open Online Course and Cormier (2010) explains that the MOOC was a "response to the challenges faced by organizations and distributed disciplines at a time of information overload" (Cormier, 2010, 0:05). Many of the early MOOCs were designed around the core principles of connectivism. Connectivism is

posited and described by Siemens (2005) as a "learning theory for the digital age."

Connectivism seeks to explain learning in complex and rapidly changing digital

environments. Today we call these early MOOCs and MOOCs that are offered in a

similar format, cMOOCs, a short form for the term connectivist MOOC.

Between 2008 and 2011, several cMOOCs were offered including three iterations

of *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge*, a course on *Personal Learning*

Environments Networks and Knowledge (PLENK10), *MobiMOOC*, *eduMOOC*, and

Change11 (Downes, n.d.). One key aspect of these original MOOCs was the element of

autonomy: MOOC learners were allowed the freedom to create their own personalized

learning experiences, using tools outside the core tool suites deployed by the designers

and instructors of the course. Fini (2009) wrote about the emergence and potential of

MOOCs as follows: "lifelong learners can now use various tools to build and manage

their own learning networks, and MOOCs may provide opportunities to test such

networks" (p. 1). The format and characteristics of MOOCS caused McAuley et al.

(2010) to describe MOOC participation as "emergent, fragmented, diffuse, and diverse"

(pp. 4-5).

At the same time, other open course initiatives emerged that eventually entered

the popular consciousness as MOOCs. These initiatives began at universities such as

Stanford University, Harvard University, and MIT. Some of the MOOC providers that

emerged from these initiatives are Udacity, Coursera, and edX. The year 2012 was a

landmark year for MOOCs. For instance, edX reported that there were 597,692 unique

registrants in the first year of operations, 2012, across the site's 17 course offerings, with

around 40,000 registrants earning a certificate of completion (Ho et al., 2014). It was

also in 2012 that theorists and practitioners began to differentiate between the original

MOOCs, redefined as connectivist MOOCs (cMOOCs), and a newer "AI Style" course

(Rodriguez, 2012), termed an xMOOC. Rodriguez (2012) termed the course "AI Style"

after a course on Artificial Intelligence offered at Stanford University that followed this

format. Developments in the xMOOC model occurred both in North America as well as

globally. For instance, in Europe platforms such as OpenEdu (Italian), France Université

Numerique (French), Miríada X (Spanish), FutureLearn (English), iVersity (German),

and Open Courses (Greek) emerged, while in Asia and Oceania platforms such as

Open2Study (Australian), XuetangX (Chinese), J-MOOC (Japanese), and OpenLearning

(Malaysian) were developed. This list is partial. When considered in combination with

the growth of offered MOOCs, registered on the MOOC tracker (Shah, 2014), even a

partial list does make the point that MOOCs were more than a mere educational

technology fad from the year 2012.

     A Brief Introduction to MOOC Designs. In terms of course design, and the

learning experience, the two MOOC types differ markedly from one another. The

cMOOC's primary design approach is the connectivist pedagogical model. According to

Siemens (2005), connectivism is founded on the following principles:

- Learning and knowledge rests in diversity of opinions.

- Learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources.

- Learning may reside in non-human appliances.

- Capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known.

- Nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual

     learning.

- Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.

- Currency (accurate, up-to-date knowledge) is the intent of all connectivist learning activities.

- Decision-making is itself a learning process. Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a shifting reality. While there is a right answer now, it may be wrong tomorrow due to alterations in the information climate affecting the decision.

Siemens (2013) further explains that the pedagogical model of connectivism views knowledge as:

> a networked state and learning as the process of generating those networks and adding and pruning connections. Of particular importance in cMOOCs is the view of knowledge as being generative and the importance of artifact creation as a means of sharing personal knowledge for others to connect to and with. [...] cMOOCs are largely open in terms of the activities that learners can pursue related to the theme, with limited structure and weekly themes. (p. 8)

Siemens (2012) also asserts that the cMOOC aims to foster autonomous and self-regulated learners who interact in many spaces, and in a distributed manner. For Siemens (2013), coherence is learner-formed and instructor-guided. The characteristics of connectivist learning can be summed up as: autonomy, diversity, openness, and connectivity (Mackness, Waite, Roberts, & Lovegrove, 2013). Learning actions in a cMOOC consist of aggregating, remixing, repurposing, and feeding forward (Downes, 2011). Through these learning actions, learners in a cMOOC examine resources that pique their interest, categorize, store, annotate and augment (or create new artefacts), and

they share those with the course community, which sharing process begins the cycle anew. Due to learner autonomy, the cMOOC is highly tolerant of lurking behaviors on the part of the learners. Nonnecke and Preece (2001) describe lurkers as being part of a silent majority in an electronic forum, where one (the lurker) posts occasionally or not at all but is known to read the group's postings regularly (p. 1).

One distinction between cMOOCs and xMOOCs involved the interpretation of what constitutes massive enrollments. In relation to cMOOCs, the word "massive" refers to enrollments measured in the high hundreds to the low thousands. For example, the MOOC *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge* offered in 2008 had about 2,200 registered participants (Downes, 2008). By contrast, the xMOOC, or content-MOOC as Lane (2012) originally termed this type of MOOC, are courses with "huge enrollments, commercial prospects, big university professors, automated testing, and exposure in the popular press" (para. 6). The xMOOC traces its origins to instructivist approaches to teaching, inspired in part by precursor sites such as the Khan Academy. Hence, the main method for content delivery in xMOOCs is videos of either the "talking head" variety as seen in early Coursera courses or the digital whiteboard video as used in the Udacity model. Siemens (2013) describes the role of the teacher in this model as the expert and the role of the student as a content consumer. Learning in this context is primarily done through a knowledge duplication paradigm wherein the learner views certain content and then takes a multiple-choice quiz or writes a short essay. Multiple choice quizzes typically correspond to lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Bali, 2014), levels that focus on recall and classification (Anderson et al., 2001). Essays in a MOOC are typically graded through automatic means such as Automatic Essay Scoring (AES) or Calibrated

Peer Review (CPR) wherein fellow students grade one another's submissions (Balfour, 2013). While essays have the potential for a broader range of placement within Bloom's taxonomy, in a span from recall to evaluation, both CPR and AES impose tight parameters on the learner-author to accommodate mechanized assessment adequately. However, such tight parameters also limit how high in Bloom's levels a learner might reach. Consequently, the length and rigor of an xMOOCs become important design considerations, as compared to the level of consideration, length, and rigor require when designing a cMOOC. Haber (2014) notes that the xMOOC variety attempts to transfer the traditional college course to the open environment with the result that most of the course designs have mirrored the 12- to 16-week length of a traditional college course (p. 79).

Working Together

In academia working together is held in high esteem due to the perceived benefits. Researchers working with one another are credited with engaging in a work model that produces the highest quality work (Mohammadi, Asadzani, & Malgard, 2017). The rhetoric of university centers of teaching and learning emphasizes the value of designing courses to include activities that require learners to collaborate. Cornell University's Center for Teaching Excellence (Cornell University CTE, n.d.) suggests that collaborative learning is based on four principles: (1) the learner is the primary focus of instruction; (2) interaction and "doing" are of primary importance; (3) working in groups is an important mode of learning; and (4) structured approaches to developing solutions to real-world problems should be incorporated into learning. These principles tie collaboration together with active learning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991), problem-based learning (Barrows &

Tamblyn, 1980; Boyd & Falletti, 1997; Wood, 2003), student-centered learning (Hoidn, 2017; Weimer, 2002), and a Vygotskian view of learning, which views learning as a social process (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Cornell's Center for Teaching Excellence, through collaboration, learners develop higher-order thinking skills, leadership skills, communication skills, self-esteem, and learner responsibility. The Institute for Teaching and Learning Innovation at the University of Queensland overtly identifies collaborative learning as an integral part of their active learning strategies (University of Queensland, n.d.).

Collaboration is also seen as an important component by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), so much so that ISTE has incorporated collaboration into its standards for students, educators, administrators, and coaches (ISTE, n.d.). For these reasons, I am including an overview of collaboration and cooperation as a means of working together with others. I also provide an overview of some of the mechanics of working together with others, as well as diverse contexts for working together.

Collaboration and Cooperation: Distinct Approaches to Working Together.
Collaboration and cooperation are the terms for two approaches to working together. Before I introduce each term, I need to point out one salient critique. Both in the published research and in everyday parlance, the terms "collaboration" and "cooperation" often are used interchangeably (Olivares, 2007). Even in professional practice literature, such as the 2017 Horizon Report, the terms "cooperative learning" and "collaborative learning" are used interchangeably (Adams et al., 2017, p. 20). I have observed this frequent imprecision myself while researching the differences between these two terms for this literature review. While these terms are related and are often used

interchangeably, it is important to keep in mind that there are differences between the

processes and even the purposes of cooperation and collaboration. Furthermore, literature

regarding collaborative work strongly emphasizes the technologies used to achieve

collaboration rather than the actual processes of collaboration, which can be technology

agnostic. A considerable amount has been written about collaboration; however,

imprecision in the use of the term, and a technology-centric focus, contribute to a low

signal-to-noise ratio when it comes to a review of the literature on *the processes that*

drive collaboration. In other words, while a search of academic databases for

collaboration yields a plethora of search results, the literature does not actually address

collaboration as the concept defined by researchers but rather addresses activity that

conforms to the everyday use of the term collaboration as used loosely to refer to

working together.

Downes (2014) defines the terms collaboration and cooperation by sharing an

unattributed definition he discovered in which collaboration is defined as "when people

work together (co-labor) on a single shared goal" while cooperation is when people

"perform together (co-operate) while working on selfish yet common goals" (2014, slide

5). When we examine these terms in the context of learning, cooperative and

collaborative learning, we discover that these two approaches, while related, were

developed for two different student populations: student populations of different ages,

experience, concept mastery, and levels of interdependence (Bruffee, 1995). Bruffee

(1995) notes that cooperative learning was developed originally for younger learners,

with the goal of teaching foundational knowledge and maintaining group member

accountability in the process. Students in a cooperative could break down individual parts

of a larger project; individuals could accomplish their own parts, as an independent

contribution to the larger project. This model provides the instructor with a position of

authority.

On the other hand, collaborative learning was designed with adolescent and adult

learners in mind and was designed to support the goal of examining and acquiring non-

foundational knowledge. In collaborative learning, the work is not cut into neat pieces as

it is in cooperative learning. Therefore, in collaborative learning, the lines of

accountability are much more blurred than in cooperative learning. Accountability is

kept track of in cooperation but not in collaboration. Collaborative learning also

encourages group dissent through which members of a working group can propose

alternate ideas and debate them to come up with the best alternatives. Bruffee (1995)

asserts that cooperative relationships can evolve into collaborative relationships but

maintains that they are not the same. He sums up his comparison of the two as follows:

> the major disadvantage of collaborative learning is that in nurturing the
>
> educational rewards to be gained from self-governed student peer relations, it
>
> sacrifices guaranteed accountability. The major disadvantage of cooperative
>
> learning is that in guaranteeing accountability, it risks maintaining authority
>
> relations within each small working group and in the class as a whole that
>
> replicate the authority relations of traditional education. (Bruffee, 1995, p. 20)

Based on a review of the literature which included Bruffee's (1995) work, Olivares

(2005) compiled the table below which describes succinctly some overall differences

between these two models (see Table 1).

Table 1

Differences Between Cooperative and Collaborative Learning (Olivares, 2005)

Characteristic	Cooperative Learning	Collaborative Learning
Knowledge	Foundational	Non-foundational; a social artifact
Epistemological orientation	Structured instruction	Social instruction
Process	Achievement-oriented	Course of action
Group structure	High/positive interdependence	low/laissez faire/individualistic
Teacher's role	micro manager, hands-on/director	moderator/facilitator/guide
Student's participant roles	cooperative/agreeable	dissent/independent
Goals	Develop social skills and learning for all members	Knowledge construction through conversation; concern for problem solving

There are additional views on the subject of distinctions between collaboration and cooperation. For instance, Dillenbourg (1999) summarizes his view that "the words 'collaborative learning' describe *a situation* in which particular forms of interaction among people are expected to occur, which would trigger learning mechanisms, but there is no guarantee that the expected interactions will actually occur" (p. 5; italics in original).

According to Dillenbourg (1999), the word collaborative concerns four aspects of learning, namely a situation, interactions, learning mechanisms, and the effects of collaborative learning. In Dillenbourg's view (1999), situations require a certain degree of symmetry to be considered collaborative; Dillenbourg includes symmetry of action, of

knowledge, and of status as examples of these symmetries (p. 7). His two final criteria

are the criterion of shared goals among members, and the criterion that the activity

involves some sort of division of labor. Dillenbourg (1999) acknowledges that some

scholars use collaboration and cooperation to mean the same thing when it comes to the

division of labor, while others do not. For Dillenbourg (1999) the division of labor is a

matter of scale. In a collaborative effort, the complexity of collaboration, and how

interwoven one's work is with the work of others in that collaborative, can depend on the

task and the individual circumstance at any given time; that is to say that in collaboration

the extent of the division of labor is unknown at the beginning of the collaboration and

the division of labor is negotiable; whereas in a cooperative the extent of the division of

labor is known and made explicit at the outset.

        Another view is offered by Panitz (1999) who defines collaboration as "a

philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle where individuals are responsible for

their actions, including learning and respect the abilities and contributions of their peers"

(para. 4-5), and cooperation as "a structure of interaction designed to facilitate the

accomplishment of a specific end product or goal through people working together in

groups" (para. 4-5). In this view, collaboration describes a way of thought, while

cooperation describes a way of working.

        Finally, Downes (2010) draws connections between groups and networks, and

between collaboration and cooperation by examining all four terms through the lenses of

autonomy, diversity, openness, and interactivity. He indicates that collaboration is a

function of groups. In a collaborative, the work of the individuals is usually determined

by the needs of the group, and that work is directed by some sort of leader; diversity of

goals is not a desirable feature in a collaborative; rather, the common goal must take precedence; there is a clear distinction between who is in the group and who is not, and information diffuses from a central core to the periphery. Downes (2010) contrasts these attributes of a collaborative with characteristics of a cooperative, wherein:

- an "individual participates out of his or her own volition and acts according to individually defined values or principles" (para. 4);

- "there is no common element uniting the group; rather, each individual engages in a completely unique set of interactions based on his or her own needs and preferences" (para. 5);

- "there is not a clear boundary or even a recognized set of members. While membership in a group is an all-or-nothing thing, membership in a network may be tenuous," (para. 6); and

- "there is a relative equality of communications and connectivity; there will be no big spike or single centre of influence" (para. 7).

What is evident from these descriptions is that while Downes' definitions and criteria (2010) are similar to criteria mentioned by other authors, Downes appears to invert these criteria, i.e., the characteristics others attribute to cooperation Downes attributes to collaboration and vice versa.

       Dimensions of Collaboration. One thing is certain about working together: Even if a course or work setting is set up with the appropriate precursors to enable working together, working together is not a guarantee. As Johnson and Johnson (1994) point out, even if groups are brought together by an external authority (such as a teacher), collaboration does not happen naturally. On the procedural and the human dimensions,

several variables factor into design decisions regarding collaboration, including how groups of people come together to participate in collaboration, and how working relationships ultimately evolve. In this section, I describe selected factors that go into the procedural and human dimensions of the collaboration equation and that impact how collaborations unfold.

Among the human factors that impact collaboration are group size, participants' valuation of the experience, and factors that enable collaboration. Dillenbourg's (1999) research indicates that groups of four or five work most effectively. Topping (2005) extends this premise, suggesting that small groups of learners should be made up of heterogeneous learners. This heterogeneity of groups is also endorsed within Roberts and Nason's (2011) review of the literature on group work. In Topping's (2005) work the teacher facilitates and guides the process, but in more autonomous workgroup situations, a group leader (or leaders) may be needed to fill in this role. It is also worth considering what people get out of their participation in a group. For instance, in their work investigating professional development for teachers, Nerantzi and Gossman (2015) discovered that participants viewed the process of collaboration as more valuable than the actual output they created through group project work.

Locus of control appears to be another important aspect in groups and collaborative learning. Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb (2000) pointed out that "learning through a collaborative process cannot be forced upon or induced through outside forces: it has to be internally created, mutually accepted as valid and valuable, and enacted by students" (section 2, para. 4). These contentions are supported by the research done by Cuthell (2004) regarding management-mandated participation in online networks, and by

Riverin and Stacey (2008) who contend that groups should be allowed and enabled to develop their own group norms. Riverin and Stacey (2008) encourage the promotion of a sharing culture in order to facilitate online collaborative activities. This type of sharing culture can be seen in other types of collaborative communities as well, one example being the Open Source Software movement (Raymond, 2001). Raymond (2001) wrote that

> gift cultures are adaptations not to scarcity but to abundance. They arise in populations that do not have significant material scarcity problems with survival goods. We can observe gift cultures in action among aboriginal cultures living in ecozones with mild climates and abundant food. We can also observe them in certain strata of our own society, especially in show business and among the very wealthy. (p. 81)

Raymond (2001) states further that "in gift cultures, social status is determined not by what you control but by what you give away" (p. 81). Gift-giving culminates in the creation of a strong sense of community among group members that is enabled and empowered by a strong sense of trust. Trust and feelings of belonging have been identified as key enablers for participants to enter into collaboration willingly (Rourke, 2000). Wang's (2009) research reinforces and extends the notion that affiliation enables collaboration, finding that "forming groups by friendship enabled the students to maintain a warm atmosphere and close working relationship, which helped to build equality and a sense of community among group members" (p. 1145). Wang (2009) also concludes "that forming groups by friendship and making learning tasks meaningful to participants can assist in building individual accountability and positive interdependence" (p. 1145).

In general, strong feelings of community help maintain a spirit of positive

interdependence (Kirschner, 2002), another aspect identified as central to collaborative

relationships.

        Even when workgroups form it does not mean that everything proceeds without

issues. Capdeferro and Romero (2012) identified different aspects of collaborative

experiences in online environments that proved frustrating to individuals. The main issue

Capdeferro and Romero identified was a commitment imbalance among group members,

with other considerable issues being unshared or diverging goals among group members;

issues with communication and negotiation; excessive workloads, and contribution

imbalances among members. Also, even in cases in which collaboration might be

considered a success based on final deliverables, issues with the overall collaboration

may mar the experience for participants. For instance, Roberts and Nason (2011)

researched self-censorship in collaborative knowledge-building groups. They discovered

that individual members do indeed self-censor for a variety of reasons including: the self-

presentation of individual group members, the maintenance of group harmony, the

concern for others, equity of contribution to the final product, a focus on completing the

task at hand, and a perceived lack of power.

        Several models have been developed to explain the group development process

from a procedural dimension, as Chidambaram and Bostrom's (1997) work indicates.

Perhaps the most well-known model is Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development

which include: forming, norming, storming, and performing. A later revision to the model

added *adjourning* as the culminating stage of the process (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

Communication has been identified as an important factor in the collaborative process.

Thompson and Ku (2006) suggest using Ku, Cheng, and Lohr's (2006) *five Cs* framework – communicate, cooperate, compromise, complement, and commitment – to prevent ineffective communication, conflicts among group members, and subsequent negative attitudes during the group process.

Another aspect of working together includes establishing, or discovering, what roles each member will play in the collaborative effort. Gratton and Ericksson's (2007) research argues that collaboration in a group improves when the roles of individual team members are understood and defined. They argue that without a clear understanding of an individual's roles, members could waste time and energy negotiating roles or protecting their turf instead of working together on meeting a shared goal. Gratton and Ericksson (2007) also add that "if a team perceives the task as one that requires creativity, where the approach is not yet well known or predefined, its members are more likely to invest time and energy in collaboration" (p. 9). Task ownership, according to Kirschner, Strijbos, Kreijns, and Beers (2004), is related to individual accountability and positive interdependence. When individual members are individually accountable for their work, they will also invest in the group's performance. Positive interdependence results when group members depend on one another, and support and motivate each other to reach common goals.

Contexts of Collaboration. What are some reasons for which people either voluntarily work together or are asked to work together by external authority? There are many interpersonal and intrapersonal contexts for working together, too many to enumerate and beyond the scope of this work. For this reason, this section is not meant to be an exhaustive accounting of reasons why individuals start, and maintain, their

collaborative working relationships. Rather, this section aims to provide a brief, yet broad, overview to contextualize collaboration.

Some external factors that promote working together center upon the complexity of knowledge and expertise in our modern world. In the business world, for instance, decisions tend to be made by groups and not by individuals (Feichtner & Davis, 1984), and this is not a new trend. This shift from individual decision-making to group decision-making has become the norm due to the ever-increasing complexity of the business environment. This necessitates working together. As Feichtner and Davis pointed out as early as the 1980s, one person cannot satisfactorily cope with this increased complexity (1984). In the healthcare field, and in healthcare education, multidisciplinarity is also desired given that there is a collaboration between clinical staff and healthcare educators (Alpay & Littleton, 2001). In the field of education teacher-teacher collaboration also constitutes a best practice amongst educators (DuFour, 2004), and teacher-staff collaboration is also seen in contexts where course integration of ICT is desired (Alpay & Littleton, 2001). Even in research contexts, collaborative research is growing due to the increase in relationships between academia, industry, and government (Mkwizu & Ngaruko, 2019).

In learning contexts, course designers may be designing with learner collaboration in mind because of the benefits of working together. Peer learning, and by extension cooperative learning, is seen as a means of promoting advanced literacies (Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 2002). There is an element of developing mutual respect and fostering joint responsibility through collaboration (Alpay & Littleton, 2001). Other advantages of collaborative learning include the development of critical thinking, problem-solving

skills, the skills of self-reflection (Kimi-Yeboah, Yuan, & Dogbey, 2017) as well as the

co-creation of knowledge (Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke, 2009; Kimi-Yeboah, Yuan, &

Dogbey, 2017). Finally, some types of collaborative groups increase the quality of life in

the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1999), they stimulate creativity (Burke, 2011), and

challenge learners in both social and emotional ways (Laal & Laal, 2002). It should be

noted that collaborative learning is a broad term in that it seems to apply to some

foundational aspects of online learning such as working with others in course discussion

forums (e.g., Brindley et al., 2009; Nielsen, Chan, & Jahng, 2010). However, it entails

working together on a problem that cannot be reasonably completed by one learner, and

hence the production of the deliverable necessitates working together with others. This

practice brings the classroom activity full circle into the working world, giving learners

practice in what's expected in the business world (Pfaff, & Huddleston, 2003), and

valued by employers (Burke, 2011).

Even without an external force acting upon the learner to encourage (or force)

them to work together, learners may seek out opportunities to collaborate.   In some

cases, it might be directly related to the perceived expectations of future working

environments (e.g., Alpay & Littleton, 2001; Feichtner & Davis, 1984). In other

instances, learners seek out collaborative work because of positive past experiences

(Brindley et al., 2009). Research, for example, demonstrates that learners can experience

higher satisfaction in online learning when they work in collaborative learning (Kimi-

Yeboah, Yuan, & Dogbey, 2017). It is interesting to point out that learners dread and

avoid collaborative learning in the form of small groups, with members not of their own

choosing (Brindley et al., 2009; Nielsen et al., 2010), but research indicates that

heterogeneous groups gain competence ability quicker than groups in that were more

homogenous (Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 2002), and the worst group experiences tend to be

the ones where students form their own groups (Feichtner & Davis, 1984). Learners need

to develop strong feelings of being welcomed, accepted, needed, valued, and have a sense

of belonging (Peacock & Cowan, 2019). This is perhaps why learners join working

groups, when not prompted, or join efforts with people that they already know when

creating self-formed groups. Being a member of a community, where people strive for a

common purpose, is also what Siemens (2002) describes as one end of the learner-learner

interaction spectrum. Finally, there are people who collaborate in order to not collaborate,

as antithetical as that may sound. Johnson and Johnson (1999) describe these as a

pseudolearning group, one of the four kinds of groups that they identify. In a

pseudolearning group, each member is concerned for their own benefit, and individual

work contributed is not for the benefit of the group as a whole. In the work context,

Sonnenwald and Piece (2000) call this type of collaboration "contested collaboration" (p.

463). In contested collaboration individuals may maintain an outward stance of

collaboration but work to further their own interests, and at times sabotage the

collaborative effort of the group (Sonnenwald & Piece, 2000).

Summary

       This chapter has explored key areas of the literature that relate to my mini

research puzzles: MOOCs; working together vis-à-vis collaboration versus cooperation;

factors that impact workgroup activity that have relevance to participants' experiences in

Rhizo-related workgroups. and some interpersonal and intrapersonal contexts for working

together. The key research findings in the literature review presented in this chapter

indicate that working together with others in a classroom context is not an easy task. There are a variety of factors that impact group processes and group efficacy. Successful groups are those with diverse membership. Successful groups also have members take the time to develop a cohesive communicative and trust structure to support their group efforts.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Introduction

       This research study was designed as a narrative inquiry based on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). As I noted in Chapter 1, a narrative inquiry is different from other research methods and differs in structure and nomenclature relative to the more conventional research approaches commonly employed in doctoral dissertations. This chapter provides background into the methodological approach of this study, as well as other relevant processes, and key considerations including information about participants, field text collection, ethical considerations, research credibility, and the analysis process.

Context for the Study

       In May of 2014, and in January of 2015, Dave Cormier initiated and facilitated two MOOCs on Rhizomatic Learning (Cormier, 2014a, 2014b, 2015). Cormier describes his original intentions as aiming to create a six-week course on the Peer2Peer University (P2PU) platform to have short conversations about his work on Rhizomatic Learning, and he was expecting no more than 50 people to be interested in joining (Cormier, 2014a).

       Cormier (2008) wrote that in the "rhizomatic model of learning, curriculum is not driven by predefined inputs from experts; it is constructed and negotiated in real-time by the contributions of those engaged in the learning process" (p. 5). Cormier's notion of the Rhizome derives from, and is influenced by, the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). In Cormier's formulation of rhizomatic learning, "knowledge can only be negotiated, and the contextual, collaborative learning experience shared by constructivist and connectivist pedagogies is a social as well as a personal knowledge-creation process with mutable

goals and constantly negotiated premises" (Cormier, 2008, p. 3). Cormier frames his metaphor of the rhizome as trying to solve issues such as determining what we consider current, or accurate, in emerging fields where currency becomes increasingly transitory. Cormier continues by saying that the existing cycles of discovery, learning, and publishing are too static and prescribed to be useful in more fluid environments; hence, a new way of teaching and learning is needed in order to avoid learning based on outdated information. The metaphor of the rhizome provided the foundational philosophy for the design of the Rhizomatic Learning courses (Mackness, Bell, & Funes, 2016) even though both Rhizo14 and Rhizo15 are described as being cMOOCs (Mackness et al., 2016). The courses initiated by Cormier have come to be known by the hashtags that were used in various social media platforms to identify posts directed toward the community. These posts on social media were made by both community members of the Rhizomatic Learning courses, and those outside them. The 2014 course is known as Rhizo14 (without the "#" sign), and the 2015 version of the course is known as Rhizo15.

　　　　With this framework in mind, Cormier thought up a set of challenging questions to focus around. Those questions and topics were as follows:

　　　　Week 1 – Cheating as Learning (Jan 14-21)

　　　　Week 2 – Enforcing Independence (Jan 21-28)

　　　　Week 3 – Embracing Uncertainty (Jan 28-Feb 4)

　　　　Week 4 – Is Books Making Us Stupid? (Feb 4-Feb 11)

　　　　Week 5 – Community as Curriculum (Feb 11-Feb 18)

　　　　Week 6 – Planned Obsolescence (Feb 18-?) (Cormier, 2014, p. 109)

When the 2014 course began it had over 500 participants (Cormier, 2014c), however, as Mackness et al. (2016) explain since not everyone registered on the course platform (P2PU) the exact number of participants who started the course is unknown. At the conclusion of the course, Cormier (2014a) estimated that about 50 core participants continued to actively participate, while the rest remained only distantly connected. While the course was in session the participants took his vague prompts and interpreted them in a variety of ways (Cormier, 2014a). Cormier adopted the role of party host (Lau, 2014) where participants were encouraged to mingle and discuss without any specific plan or destination. This created both opportunities for unforeseen creativity and some potential for conflict. An example of such unforeseen opportunities is what Lau (2014) describes in her article: there was an example of an instance where "an experience which started with poems left by participants in the comments of one of [her] blog posts, leading to audiovisual remixes, and culminating in a week-long, seven-person poetry collaboration across Twitter and SoundCloud" (p. 237). Mackness et al. (2016) describe the atmosphere of play and fun as emerging from the group, and in addition to the poetry other types of multimedia were part of the regular collection of artefacts, including personal writings, music, photography, and other artwork. These types of engagement were participant-initiated (Bali et al., 2016).

At this point, most of the discussion was occurring in the Facebook group, and not on the original platform which was P2PU. At the conclusion of what might be considered as *Cormier's portion of the course design,* participants of Rhizo14 started suggesting topics to tackle in subsequent weeks, ultimately extending the course by another six weeks. Finally, additional examples of such unforeseen work were the academic

collaborations that emerged from this MOOC. There were different permutations of

people working together to understand their learning experiences. Examples of these

include the work of Bali et al. (2016), where we used collaborative autoethnography to

understand our Rhizo14 experiences; Hamon et al. (2015), where we examined

participatory research in a cMOOC; and Honeychurch, Stewart, Bali, Hogue, and

Cormier (2016), where the authors strived to understand the shared space in Rhizo14 and

how it enabled the community to be more than the course curriculum. Even though years

have passed since these two Rhizo MOOCs concluded, individuals from those MOOCs

still engage with one another to collaboratively research topics of mutual interest. Recent

examples are the works of Honeychurch, Bozkurt, Singh, and Koutropoulos (2017),

Koutropoulos, Honeychurch, and Singh (2019), and Bozkurt, Koutropoulos, Singh, and

Honeychurch (2020), that examine various aspects of lurking in open education

environments such as MOOCs.

       Not everything was collegial fun and play in the Rhizo MOOCs. Lau (2014)

describes an instance where one participant's interests were not connected to the

dominant interests of other participants, thus those participants felt a sense of exclusion.

Mackness et al. (2016) describe another situation that, in their view, impacted the way the

course operated after this issue. They wrote that

       two participants objected to a blog post by a third who had suggested that

       engagement with theory might be necessary to understand rhizomatic learning.

       What could have been framed as simply two different kinds of personal objectives

       (to learn more about the theory and to ignore the theory) became instead a site of

contention. The situation was resolved by all three parties leaving the course, and

the discussion of theory being seen as problematic from that point on. (p. 79)

Conversely, it is important to point out that other researchers also emphasize the

inclusiveness of the Rhizo14 community, and that it was a rewarding educational

experience (Bali et al., 2016). In 2015, the Rhizomatic Learning course had an encore

offering using the same problem-posing formula, but without P2PU as the course

launching point. The Facebook group had now been promoted as the gathering point, and

the initial point of content dissemination was Cormier's website.

In the end, Rhizo14 and Rhizo15 made an impact on some of those participants'

lives. Mackness and Bell (2015) described the Rhizo MOOC as being on the extreme end

of the c/x MOOC continuum "because unlike prior cMOOCs, the course was designed to

have no centre" (p. 21), while other researchers gave the Rhizo MOOCs a new prefix and

called it an rMOOC (Bali et al., 2016). While there were both positive and not-so-

positive experiences in the courses, some researchers "conclude that the emphasis in

#rhizo14 [was] on contribution and creation rather than content mastery, [and]

encouraged a sense of 'eventedness' (shared experience), which allowed our community

to thrive" (Honeychurch et al., 2016, p. 1). While the creation of subgroups or sub-

communities can create exclusion, even though unintended, Lau (2014) argues that this

"may also be seen as both natural and desirable - it's one way that participants create

shared meaning, content, and understanding, particularly in chaotic, complex, and/or low-

structured environments" (p. 239). Some researchers indicate that opportunities to

establish trust can be limited in MOOCs due to their short duration (Gašević, Kovanović,

Joksimović, & Siemens, 2014); however, it is perhaps the structure and design of the

Rhizo MOOCs that were contributing factors in enabling the emergence of collaborative

groups making them atypical MOOCs. It is within this environment that working groups

studied in this narrative inquiry emerged.

Narrative Inquiry: An Introduction

As noted by Mitchell (1981), "the study of narrative is no longer the province of

literary specialists or folklorists borrowing their terms from psychology and linguistics

but has now become a positive source of insight for all the branches of human and natural

science" (p. ix). The use of narratives as a source for research, inquiry, and human

understanding has a long, and storied, past.   Kim (2016) traces the importance of

storytelling back to Aristotle's Poetics with functions of storytelling, as discussed by

Kearney (2002), being mythos, mimesis, catharsis, phronesis, and ethos. Reismann

(2008) cites Langellier's work in tracing the "narrative turn" to the 1960s (p. 14).

Narrative has had a storied history in the fields of psychology, sociology, business,

medicine, linguistics, and education. Textbooks that introduce the novice narrative

researcher to the field identify the philosophical underpinnings to thinkers, philosophers,

and researchers such as Bakhtin, Bal, Barthes, Bateson and Mead, Booth, Bourdieu,

Bruner, Charmaz, Czarniawska, Clandinin and Connolly, Deleuze, Denzin and Lincoln,

Eco, Fairclough, Foucault, Gee, Geertz, Habermas, Josselson, Labov, Latour, Mishler,

Polanyi, Polkinghorn, Rorty, Labov, Ricoeur, Tamboukou, Vygotsky, as well as Witherell

and Noddings (Czarniawska, 2004; Daiute, 2014; Given, 2008; Kim, 2016; Pinnegar &

Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 2008). This is not an exhaustive list, but it serves to underline

the multithreaded history of understanding narrative.

In addition to the storied beginnings of narrative, and due to the diverse ways narratives can be understood, there are also diverse ways in which narratives can be analyzed. Daiute (2014) describes several approaches to analyzing a story for plot, values, and significance. Riessman (2008) describes different ways in which transcripts can be arranged and analyzed to highlight various aspects of the analysis. Given (2008) describes thematic analysis, story network analysis, visual analysis, form analysis, dialogic analysis, and organic inquiry as analytic approaches to narrative. Finally, Kim (2016) provides readers with different holistic-level means of analyzing narrative, such as critical theory perspectives (e.g., Freire, Giroux, Habermas, Marcuse, McLaren), critical race theory perspectives (e.g., Crenshaw, Delgado, Ladson-Billings), feminist perspectives (e.g., Butler, Collins, hooks, Weiler), phenomenological perspectives (e.g., Gadamer, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre), poststructuralist and postmodernist perspectives (e.g., Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Guattari, Lyotard), and experiential perspectives (e.g., Dewey).

The thread of narrative inquiry in my research is based on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who argue that "social sciences are founded on the study of experience" (p. xxiii). For Clandinin and Connelly, experience is "the starting point and key term for all social inquiry" (p. xxiii). Furthermore, they indicate that "it is equally correct to say 'inquiry into narrative' as it is 'narrative inquiry'" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). In so saying, Connelly and Clandinin describe narrative inquiry as an approach that is both a method and a phenomenon. They assert "that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives" (1990, p. 2). In narrative inquiry, narrative researchers collect those stories, tell those stories, write narratives of the

experience, and describe the lives that are lived; yet narrative inquiry is not simply a description of the storied lives that we live.

Clandinin and Connelly describe narrative inquiry as a rich method for understanding experience and define it as follows:

> It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated… narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 20)

Clandinin and Connelly describe a Deweyan view of experience as central to narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006). This view frames a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space that is made up of the dimensions of interaction, time, and space (Clandinin, 2006).

Josselson (2007) explains that "narrative research consists of obtaining and then reflecting on people's lived experience and, unlike objectifying and aggregating forms of research, is inherently a relational endeavor" (p. 537). A narrative inquirer researches by "intruding," in a polite manner, on people in the course of living their lives and by asking them to help learn something of that lived experience (Josselson, 2007). Researchers "intrude" in the lives of the researched in the hopes that they will learn something of benefit, perhaps contributing to overall knowledge about aspects of human experience (Josselson, 2007). For Clandinin (2013), potential benefits are both the practical and social justifications of a narrative inquiry. Furthermore, by 'intruding' into a participant's

life the researcher enters that experience and lives it 'in the midst' (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000). This way of perceiving one's role as a researcher sets narrative inquiry apart from

most other methods. Clandinin (2003) argues that narrative inquiry is "markedly different

from other methodologies. We begin in the midst, and end in the midst, of experience" (p.

43).

Four key terms emerge from the narrative inquirer's view of experience as a

storied phenomenon: living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Clandinin, 2013). "[P]eople

live out stories and *tell* stories of their living" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34, emphasis in

original). Then, narrative inquirers come "alongside participants" (p. 34) and begin to

engage in narrative inquiry into our lived and told stories. Clandinin and Connelly name

this process of coming alongside and inquiring the "*retelling* [of] stories" (p. 34,

emphasis in original), a process in which we inquire into the stories and move beyond

seeing these stories as fixed entities.

Clandinin (2013) tells us that there are two possible starting points for *conducting*

a narrative inquiry. We can either begin with living stories, or we can begin with telling

stories. The most common starting point, however, is with *telling* stories whereby the

researcher is engaged in conversations with research participants who tell stories of their

experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

Narrative Inquiries are fluid and "quintessentially pragmatic" (Clandinin &

Rosiek, 2007, p. 42). There is no set of procedures or linear steps that the researcher

follows. Rather, narrative inquiry is "a relational inquiry methodology that is open to

where the stories of participants experiences take each researcher" (Clandinin, 2013, p.

33). Josselson (2007) expands on this by explaining that narrative understanding is

emergent; therefore, Narrative Inquiries are only loosely designed at the start of the

process. This emergent characteristic of narrative inquiry means that questions prepared

a priori for interviews with participants may change as the inquiry progresses. Josselson

(2007) also writes that a good narrative inquiry is done inductively, with procedures and

strategies that change as our understanding grows and themes emerge. A narrative

approach to inquiry "looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and

situates the experiences within place" (Creswell, 2006, p. 185). As the narrative inquiry

unfolds, "participants' and researchers' lives meet in the midst of each of our unfolding

complex and multiple experiences" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, p. 44), and together the

researcher and the participants shape the three-dimensional space they inhabit, the time,

places, and spaces where they come together, and they negotiate ways of being together

as a means of giving accounts of their work together (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006).

Participants and Recruitment

Study participants for this project were individuals who participated in either or

both of the Rhizo MOOCs; participants who also formed, or joined, workgroups with

fellow members of those MOOCs; and who, by working together, produced academic

work for the purposes of publication. There were a finite number of these individuals (15

in total), and they were contacted via email to determine their willingness and ability to

participate in this study. I situated my participant selection approach as purposeful

selection or purposive sampling. Maxwell (2013) indicates that in this selection strategy

"particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information

that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can't be gotten as well

from other choices" (p. 97). From those who replied expressing interest and availability, I selected the first four who responded to my solicitation that met the inclusion criteria.

A narrative inquiry typically targets as the participant pool only one or two participants (Creswell, 2006); however, this posed a problem. Six (out of 15) individuals had responded that they were interested in participating. The first two participants who responded were both males which meant that there was an over-representation of men in this group of participants. The gender split in the pool of potential participants was about 50-50 (male/female) and most of the collaborative work had women as first authors. The next two respondents to agree to participate were both female, and respondents five and six were female and male respectively. At this point, I decided to expand the limit of my participating storytellers to *four* so that I had a more even representation of stories, yet still keep the field text and interim text manageable in terms of volume of texts created, and the number of story threads to follow. According to Clandinin and Connelly, field texts allow for growth and change rather than having a fixed relation between facts and ideas (2000). By expanding the number of participants, I could dive deeper into the interconnections of narrative threads, and I hoped that I wouldn't be (metaphorically) *drowning* in field texts by expanding my participant list.

Once selected, I emailed the consent form to my participants (see Appendix A), which contained formal information regarding the research project, and requested the individuals' formal consent to participate in the study.

Positioning of the Researcher

I selected narrative inquiry as my method for this research in part because the method allowed me to leverage my own lived experiences in the workgroups stemming

from both Rhizo MOOCs, which is consistent with a narrative inquiry approach to research. The narrative inquirer needs to "become part of the landscape" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 77) so that they can "be a sensitive reader of and questioner of situations" (p. 77). This helps the researcher grasp the twists and turns of the narrative threads. My prolonged exposure as a participant made me part of the landscape that I wanted to research. Furthermore, narrative inquiry also allowed me to acknowledge the lived experiences of members of the Rhizo workgroups whom I asked to tell me their own unique stories of working together. Moreover, I deemed narrative inquiry to be the method best fit to answer the topic of inquiry, my research puzzle, years after the MOOCs and MOOC-adjacent workgroup activities had concluded. In conversations that continue to unfold on the internet between members of these workgroups, the Rhizo MOOCs and our work together are still vivid in our recollections and we often engage in such collaborative activities still. As Clandinin (2013) indicated, a narrative inquiry can begin either by *living* an experience or *telling* a story about that experience. For me, and consistent with the premise of narrative inquiry, the research puzzle began with *living* the experience as a Rhizo participant and as an active workgroup member. While this research project began with *telling stories* of the aforementioned experiences, I had already been *in the midst* of temporal, interactional, and locational aspects of this inquiry before this research commenced. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use Geertz's metaphor of a parade. I was a participant in the Rhizo "parades" while they were happening; I was a participant in workgroups that formed during and after the Rhizo MOOCs, and I have maintained contact and working relationships with the members of those workgroups.

Citing a Geertzian perspective, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that "if we shift our position in the [metaphorical] parade, our knowing shifts" (p. 17).

It is also my own participation in this metaphorical parade that fuels the personal justification for this narrative inquiry. My first experience in such MOOC-adjacent workgroups was in the MRT, as I described in Chapter 1. While there is some preliminary analysis of why we collaborated in the MRT (Koutropoulos, 2016), we did not pursue this project to completion. When Rhizo14 and Rhizo15 provided a new opportunity to work together with other people, under similar circumstances, I answered the call as did others. But why did we engage in this way? Why did I want to participate, and why did others? Personal and academic curiosity drove me to seek answers to these questions that for me form the research puzzle.

Keeping to this parade metaphor, and consistent with narrative inquiry design, I do not operate in this project merely as an external researcher with an etic perspective conducting research into members. Rather, I also participated as one who himself marched. I was both a learner in the Rhizo courses and a member of workgroups that emerged from both the Rhizo courses; hence, I consider myself to be part of the group that is being studied, part of this metaphorical parade. My goal in this research was to balance my etic perspective, as a member of these workgroups, with that of my emic perspective as a researcher into the stories of those workgroups. In research, the emic perspective is one through which the researcher aims to arrive at "the subjective or participant meanings" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 45) assigned to situations. Kottak (2009) explains the "native viewpoint" (p. 53) through which the "emic approach investigates how local people think," asking: "How do they perceive and categorize the

world? What are their rules for behavior? What has meaning for them? How do they imagine and explain things?" (p. 53). By contrast, the etic perspective pertains to "objective or researcher meanings" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 45). Kottak (2009) expands this perspective, writing that "the etic approach realizes that members of a culture often are too involved in what they are doing to interpret their cultures impartially" (p. 53). Hence, "operating etically, the [researcher] emphasizes what he or she (the observer) notices and considers important … [and] should try to bring an objective and comprehensive viewpoint" to the research study (Kottak, 2009, p. 53).

During these two Rhizo MOOCs, I was a registered participant, actively participating and engaging in the MOOCs. Prior to the beginning of these open online courses, I also worked together with some of the potential study participants, those eligible to participate based on criteria discussed above (e.g., Koutropoulos & Hogue, 2012), and I was also a member of some of the workgroups (e.g., Bali et al., 2016) that emerged as a result of these two open online courses. As such, my own experience provides me with an emic perspective. Through this narrative inquiry, I also hoped to gain the etic perspective of research participants arrived at through the analysis of shared stories.

Thus, I am *not simply* an external researcher, but rather part of the experience being researched; my role here is that of researcher-as-participant. In addition to being a member of some of these workgroups that got their start during the Rhizo courses, I had participated in workgroups that had their start in previous MOOCs. The groups I joined as corollaries to the Rhizo courses were similar to groups I had joined in connection to prior courses, groups whose members had engaged in past collaborations (cf., MRT),

producing self-assigned, group-determined deliverables for publication, including

academic peer-reviewed papers, conference presentations, and articles published in non-

peer-reviewed venues. Given my previous involvement with the kinds of groups under

investigation, my perspective was of a kind Boellstorff (2008) calls a Boasian view in

which the researcher is "similar to (or personally involved with) those they study" (p. 69),

hence, the epistemological separation between the researcher and the native are

intentionally and necessarily absent (Bunzl, 2004).

      As a narrative inquiry, this research was designed to involve collaborative

methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in the service of a pragmatic purpose. Creswell

(2017) defines *pragmatism* as focusing on "the outcomes of the research - the actions,

situations, and consequences of inquiry - rather than antecedent conditions" (p. 27).

Creswell (2017) contends that "the important aspect of research is the problem being

studied and the questions asked about the problem" (p. 28). Since pragmatism is not

committed to one system of philosophy or one reality (Creswell, 2007), the pragmatic

researcher must remain open to considerations unforeseen at the beginning of the

research.

      Biases. In qualitative studies rather than attempting to eliminate bias, a task which

is impossible given that narrative researchers cannot bracket themselves out of the

inquiry, researchers need to be transparent about potential sources of bias and strive to

understand it and to use it productively (Clandinin, 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007;

Maxwell, 2013). One potential source of bias stemmed from my association with the

potential research participants through my role as a fellow *learner* in the respective

MOOCs; furthermore, I knew many of them from my role as a fellow *collaborator* in

workgroups I was researching. Because I was also a participant in these workgroups, I

had my own views regarding what occurred based on my lived experiences and my own

positioning in that metaphorical parade. My initial impressions were also something I

kept in mind when confirming or disconfirming cases, as the research progressed.

According to Clandinin (2013), one way of addressing the bias that arises from having a

participant's perspective is using autobiographical narratives, an approach which I

followed.

Field Texts

The use of the term *field texts* is another way that narrative inquiry differentiates

itself from other research methods. Clandinin and Connelly use this term to refer to data

(Clandinin, 2013). Field texts, as a term, acknowledges that in narrative inquiry the data

artefacts "are created, neither found nor discovered, by participants and researchers in

order to represent aspects of field experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 92). To

distinguish field texts from the data sources typical of other research methods, Clandinin

and Connelly note that "data tend to carry with them the idea of objective representation

of research experience" (p. 93) whereas "it is important to note how imbued field texts

are with interpretation" (p. 93). In their view, data is "audience free" (p. 102) whereas in

narrative inquiry "audience is always a presence and interpretively shapes the field texts

constructed" (p. 102), such that field texts are "always embedded within research

relationships" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 47). Clandinin explains further that the term *field*

texts signals "that the texts we compose in narrative inquiry are experiential,

intersubjective texts rather than objective texts. Field texts are co-compositions that are

reflective of the experiences of researchers and participants, and they need to be

understood as such" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 46). For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), field texts are collections such as stories, autobiographical writing, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, personal-family-social artifacts, memory boxes, and life experiences. Finally, "composing field texts means being alert to what one's participants do and say as part of their ongoing experience, and it means keeping records on how they are experiencing the experience of being in the inquiry" (p. 88). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out that participants, too, have thoughts and feelings about the inquiry. For my narrative inquiry, I collected five types of field texts: my researcher autobiography, transcripts from conversations between my storytellers and me, memos, a final survey, and blog posts.

Field Text Collection.   The first type of field text that was collected was my autobiographical account of these events as one of the participants. This autobiographical narrative included experiences working with others in academic contexts as a means of better understanding my place within this metaphorical parade. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) indicate, a narrative inquiry typically begins with a researcher's autobiography, also known as a *narrative beginning*. According to Clandinin (2013), without this first step "our studies can lead to work that is too technical or too certain. Beginning with an autobiographical narrative inquiry allows us to see that we, too, are under study in the inquiry" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 82). This step, however, is not something that is relegated to the beginning of the study, and then abandoned. Clandinin advises us that "Narrative inquirers need to continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry" (2013, p. 83). Finally, the autobiographical narrative also provided me additional means of keeping a check on my views, opinions, remembering, and feelings, on the

subject of this inquiry so that I could gather field texts about my own experiences, yet keep my experiences separate from those of the study participants. The autobiography was one of the means of ensuring that reconstructed narratives were faithful to the stories told by individual participants and that my biases were kept in check.

Another field text type was conversations with participants who worked together during the Rhizo courses; this field text included various related field texts such as transcripts produced from these conversations, as well as an initial questionnaire which I provided to my storytellers in advance of our conversations. I opted to use the term *conversation* in lieu of the term *interview* because, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write:

> research interviews normally have an inequality about them. The direction of the interview along with its specific questions are governed by the interviewer. However, researchers who established intimate participatory relationships with participants find it difficult, if not impossible, to conduct such interviews with participants. Even when they begin with the intention of conducting an interview the interview often turns into a form of conversation. (p. 110)

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, a conversation is often a way of composing field texts between pairs, or among groups of individuals. In these conversations, the interviewee is positioned as the story narrator, and the interviewer as the listener (Chase, 2005). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) agree that "conversations entail listening" (p. 109) and indicate "the listener's response may constitute a probe into experience that takes the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview" (p. 109). Conversation-based probes provide flexibility for the researcher to

gain access into three dimensions of a story, with participants as guides to what matters about the story.

To purposefully investigate the mini-puzzles that drive my narrative inquiry, I used techniques from semi-structured interviews for conversations with study participants. A semi-structured interview achieves answers to defined a priori questions while allowing the time and space to develop further both predefined questions and questions that might arise during the interview (Walliman, 2005). Marino (2012) states that "semi-structured interviews are conducive to candid and spontaneous responses. These characteristics allow for the exploration of reflections, perceptions and feelings" (p. 29). Seidman (2013) acknowledges the importance of stories in the interview process, writing that "telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness" (p. 7). Finally, it is important to acknowledge a challenge brought forth by Chase (2005):

> [N]arrative interviewing involves a paradox. On the one hand, a researcher needs to be well prepared to ask good questions that will invite the other's particular story; on the other hand, the very idea of a particular story is that it cannot be known, predicted, or prepared for in advance. (p. 662)

As part of the preparation for collecting this field text, I created a small list of a priori questions that I tested on myself. The a priori questions to guide the conversations were:

- Why did you initially join these working groups?

- Why did you want to participate?

- What were relationships like in your working groups?

- How did you get involved with the group(s)?

- What were some instances that really stood out while you were working on these projects?

- What worked well for you?

- Were there any stumbling blocks along the way? If yes, how did you/your group overcome them?

- What surprised you in this whole endeavor?

- What are some takeaways, or 'aha!' moments in these experiences?

- What others should know if they would also want to participate as well?

- Is there anything I did not ask that you think is important?

I provided my participants with the questions a week prior to our meetings. This gave them questions of interest for the semi-structured conversation, and they had an opportunity to ruminate on them before we met. This allowed participants to come to the conversation prepared *if they wanted to*. In terms of logistics, I conducted the conversation like the *Virtually Connecting* format (virtuallyconnecting.org). Many of the prospective research participants have been part of at least one virtually connecting session over the past few years. For these virtually connecting sessions, two of the most common formats are "missed conversations" and "hallway conversations" (VF Formats, n.d.). In this format, the conversation occurred individually between me and each participant. My initial estimate was that individual conversations were going to last about 45-minutes, however, given the existing rapport with study participants, many of the conversations exceeded the planned length as we engaged deeply in the conversations.

The third type of field text in my narrative inquiry was memos. The memo is a versatile form of data collection, as Maxwell (2013) reports:

> A memo can range from a brief marginal comment on an interview transcript or a theoretical idea recorded in a field journal to a full-fledged analytic essay. What all of these have in common is that they are ways of getting ideas down on paper (or in a computer), and of using this writing as a way to facilitate reflection and analytic insight. (p. 20)

For my narrative inquiry, I compiled analytic memos that reflected on the other types of field texts collected. These were composed during the field text collection process, as well as during the analysis process. Given the fluid timeline for the creation of these memos, and their flexible use, I treated memos both as field and interim texts (the latter of which I discuss in the upcoming section).

Finally, as I engaged in conversations with my storytellers, two additional types of field texts emerged. The first is a final survey that was emailed to all four participants. This survey asked participants to share their thoughts on specific threads that emerged throughout the conversations we had. This was a way of inviting further comments and for me to verify my understandings, to test that my hypotheses were on the right track, and to allow for mediated communication between participants. Three out of four participants responded to this survey. This field text type blurred the lines between field texts and interim texts.

The other type of field texts is blogs. Participants, during our conversations, indicated that they had blogged about certain aspects of what we were discussing. One participant provided links to specific blog posts. This prompted me to also search and

discover what was publicly available on the internet from other participants that

discussed the topics of interest. It also led me to examine blog posts from other Rhizo

MOOC learners; both of the Rhizo MOOC learners who only participated in the course,

and Rhizo MOOC learners who worked together on projects like the ones I was

researching. The rationale behind examining blog posts of regular Rhizo MOOC

learners, those who did not collaborate on research projects, was to get a sense of the

zeitgeist of the courses. This was prompted by one of the threads that seemed to emerge

from the conversations with my storytellers.

In the end, the information from *all* of the blog posts by regular Rhizo MOOC

learners was a lot to process. This information was only minimally and peripherally used

because it didn't contribute to the narrative itself; however, it did enable me to better

understand my storytellers, and the Rhizo MOOCs, from different perspectives. Had I

decided to use the blogs from non-research-participants, I would have been going into

greater depth on field texts that did not contribute to the stories of my four storytellers.

Understanding the motivations of background characters was important, but those

supporting characters did not require exposition in the narrative. The important thing was

to explore those connections and focus on how those webs of relationships impacted the

narrative (Craig, 2009a).

Interim Texts

Another distinguishing characteristic of the narrative inquiry approach is the use

of *interim texts*. In narrative inquiry, researchers do not move from *field texts* to *research

texts* linearly. *Research texts* in other research methods are called *findings*. The process

of movement from field text to research text is described as being "layered in

complexity" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132). The step that bridges the gap between

field text and research text involves the use of interim texts. Interim texts are the products

of continuous analysis of collected field texts as the researcher tries to grasp the "many

twisting and turning narrative threads that pulse through every moment" (p. 77). Just as

there is no one approach to structuring a narrative inquiry, there is no one format or

process prescribed for the creation and use of interim texts. Rather, interim texts "take on

different forms and vary according to the circumstances surrounding the life of the

inquiry and particularly the research and scholarly life of the inquirer" (p. 133).

Interim texts are constructed throughout the inquiry and begin to be composed as

soon as field texts begin to be composed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In a narrative

inquiry, research participants are involved, to greater or lesser extents, in the co-

composition of texts (field, interim, and research texts) (Clandinin, 2013). There is a

back-and-forth movement that exists when a researcher moves between field texts and

interim texts, "a complicated and iterative process, full of twists and turns. There is no

linear unfolding of data gathering to data analysis to publishing research findings" (p.

49). Clandinin explains that a continuing dialogue between participants and the

researcher, as the researcher formulates interim texts, can enable the researcher to seek

out additional field texts which can be used to compose research texts that both

participants and the researcher consider more authentic.

Clandinin (2013) indicates that "interim research texts are often partial texts that

are open to allow participants and researchers opportunities to further compose storied

interpretations and to negotiate the multiplicity of possible meanings" (p. 47). At the

onset of any narrative inquiry, it would be impossible to list all interim texts that might be

created. Interim texts are partial texts that are open and allow the researcher, and participants, opportunities to delve deeper into the stories and interpretations of those stories (Clandinin, 2013). The openness of interim texts allows for a negotiation of the multiplicity of possible meanings embedded in the narrative (Clandinin, 2013). This negotiation occurs from beginning to end, and plotlines are continually revised as consultations take place over written materials and as further texts are composed to develop points of importance in the revised story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Interim texts are written at different times in the inquiry process, different interim texts can serve different purposes, and they also can take on a multiplicity of different forms (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Interim Text Creation. In my narrative inquiry, interim texts began with the transcriptions of the conversations I had with my four storytellers. After correcting most of the automated transcription errors, I read through each transcript once to refresh my memory of the conversation and highlighted some elements that were beckoning. These elements were marked so that participants could also respond to them if they so wished. This verification of transcripts was also part of the member-checking strategy (see the subsequent section in this chapter on validity and trustworthiness). Most participants verified transcripts, but one trusted the validity of my corrected transcript without reviewing; they were unable to review due to lack of time. After participants verified their transcripts and added in their thoughts, I continued to re-read through each chat log in successive iterations, making notes both in a separate memo file, and in the conversation log itself using the commenting feature of the Microsoft Word word-processing software. This type of back-and-forth discussion is common, even within a

single document, as the narrative researcher explores the various threads that are narrated

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990)

Another type of interim text consisted of blog posts mentioned in the previous

section. These blog posts were created by participants of my study, as well as other

learners who took part in the Rhizo MOOCs and who were cited by my study

participants. I created a copy of each blog post as a Google Doc so that I could retain a

copy of the materials for annotation purposes. The process of understanding the content

of blog posts didn't just end at the text of each blog post. Rather, each blog post allowed

me to trace connections between participants. Blogs are hypertext documents, which

means that in each blog post the author of the post can react or respond to another

participant's blog post, and in doing so link to that person's blog post. Additionally,

blogs usually have a feature in which readers can leave a comment on specific posts, and

many in the Rhizo community had left comments on blog posts which further allowed

both an expansion of ideas presented in the post, and this engagement allowed for a

tracing of connections amongst participants.

Once I started following connections from one blog post to another, a web of

activity emerged between Rhizo MOOC participants. Some of these participants were

also taking part in the collaborations. After I read through blog posts marked with the

#rhizo, #rhizo14, and #rhizo15 category markers, I collected 81 relevant blog posts from

my four storytellers, and 60 blog posts from other Rhizo MOOC participants that my

storytellers were responding to, reacting to, or expanding upon, in their blog posts. These

blog posts were further read, re-read, and annotated. I made connections between the

various blog posts and the chat transcripts from my conversations with my storytellers.

Once I had completed a few iterations of reading through the conversations and the collected blog posts, a few aspects emerged that required clarification. A short survey was administered, and three of the four participants were able to respond. While this is technically a field text, once a copy of the answers, provided by the storytellers, was imported into a text file, the annotations and further analysis constitute an interim text. After several non-linear iterations between all of the interim texts, a narrative was emerging. Based on who mentioned whom in the conversations, and who interacted with whom in the blog posts, I drafted a list of actors. This list of characters included both my storytellers and the people that they mentioned or interacted with. I assigned each one of them an English gender-neutral name for the restory (Chapter 4). The restory document that was in an *in-progress* state was also a type of interim text because it was a text that is not in its final form. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) inform us, plotlines are continuously revised as consultation takes place in order to develop points of importance in the story. Once the restory had a coherent narrative structure, enough of a structure that made it possible to receive an external review, it was first shared with my dissertation advisors for comments and questions. After some editing and tweaking, it was subsequently shared with the original storytellers as a means of both member-checking and ensuring that elements that they thought were integral could be given a second (or third) glance to see if they could be incorporated into the restory. Finally, it was shared with a colleague familiar with the Rhizo MOOCs in order to work out any narrative plot bottlenecks or elements that negatively impacted the storytelling, as well as to ensure that my restory captured the sense of *being there*. As Ely (2007) writes, the presentation of the material can be considered as another actor in the story:

> The presentation speaks as an entity: by what is said and not said, by how the
>
> author shares voice of self and that of others, by how the reader is invited in, by
>
> the variety and impact of its rhetorical forms, by its verbal and nonverbal
>
> messages about people. Taken as a whole, the piece meshes into a tapestry that
>
> signifies the unique spirit and ethic of its author ("When All is Said and Done,"
>
> para. 5)

This feedback allowed for a critique of the storytelling medium as a means of presenting

research findings. It enabled me to get a sense of how well those findings were

communicated to a general audience that is not familiar with the ebbs and flows of the

Rhizo MOOCs, through a fictional narrative.

Fictionalization. One of the narrative inquiry tools I used in creating texts was

fictionalization. Clandinin et al. (2006) describe fictionalization as "the act of using what

you know of something […] to create a story around this knowledge that shifts the

original story of experience" (p. 66). Fictionalization is used for a variety of reasons,

including ensuring an extra measure of anonymity and allowing for the sharing of

accounts that may be potentially messy (Craig, 2009b).

One aspect of fictionalization is the use of a fictional persona, Aliki, who

embodies qualities and personal curiosities that are common to several of the storytellers,

including me. Aliki is the protagonist through which the reader explores the Rhizo-

collaborations. Since she is a relative newcomer to this group, she gets to ask the

questions that the in-group may already know the answers to. Aliki initially gets to know

people through their work, and then gets to know them in real life, as people. Another

way fictionalization is applied is through the restory setting. The restory is set in a fictional future about ten years after the researched events took place.

There are practical reasons for restorying in the future. The first reason is that it's easier to insert a fictional persona into the story and have them interact with our storytellers and background characters; this fictional persona is autonomous with Aliki having her own ponderings and curiosity. By having a fictional persona, and not just being an avatar for the researcher, the story characters interact with her in a more authentic way, and it is an opportunity to combine common qualities and backgrounds of storytellers, hence removing unnecessary repetition in the narrative.

The second reason for restorying in the future was a fuzzy memory of event timelines. As I was re-searching the stories shared via our conversations, and cross-checking with historical facts, for example when a specific course was offered or when a specific paper was published, the memory of participants was at times *fuzzy*. This is to be expected given that these Rhizo-collaborations were six years ago, as of this writing. Additionally, as Craig (2009a) reminds us, reflection is never static and the human experience is constantly in flux, which makes narrative truth different from historical truth. Instead of stumbling on technical information, such as who was the first author for a given paper, which paper or presentation came first, or when someone attended a specific MOOC, setting the story in the future allows the audience to focus on big picture ideas rather than whether a given MOOC was offered in 2006, 2013, or 2015. It is the resonance and usefulness to others that's important (Craig, 2009a) rather than the specific timeline of events.

Finally, another fictionalized element of the restory revolves around personas based on my storytellers. I opted to use English language gender-neutral names, and I did not use gender-specific personal pronouns to avoid inadvertently providing clues as to who participating storytellers were. The eligible participant pool, based on my delimitations, is rather small and everyone who participated in the Rhizo MOOCs knows everybody else. Even if all MOOC participants were included (n= approx. 250), the community is close-knit and would most likely be able to guess who the specific storytellers were based on a variety of characteristics and background information. Hence, to ensure the privacy of participants the restory focused not on recounting specific events from start to end, but rather focused on broader ideas, processes, and take-aways wherever possible. To arrive at the final restory, it went through various iterations to ensure an engaging story with key takeaways. As one of my storytellers said, "the worst thing you can do is to bore your audience."

Research Texts

Research texts are a final deliverable for a narrative inquiry, and they are at a distance from field texts; research texts grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Research texts are a natural punctuation point of a narrative inquiry, and they keep in mind aspects like readability, beauty, and wider communication (Ely, 2007). As Clandinin (2013) writes, regardless of the starting point for each narrative inquiry, when we write research texts, we are still in the midst. Clandinin (2013) reminds us that there will never be a final story because each story of experience opens up new stories; these stories are to be lived and told, and they carry the responsibility of retelling and reliving. Craig (2009a) also adds

that there is always a story *before* the story, as well as a *coda* or *epilogue* of what happens

afterward, even as the research study continues to wrap up.

Keeping these points in mind, my narrative inquiry has two research texts. The

first research text is the restory itself (Chapter 4) that was created by recursively

questioning the field texts, re-searching, and striving to gain meaning and significance.

The restory is a device used by narrative inquirers and it is typically used to reconstruct a

story of the event from the point of view of the storyteller at the time the event occurred

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As mentioned previously, I also used fictionalization in

this restory, thus, Chapter 4 combines two narrative inquiry devices to create this research

text. The goal in creating the restory is to highlight certain significant thoughts, events,

and actions that occurred. A restory is not a verbatim replica of what the storytellers

recount because what is shared contains bumps, hesitations, silences, repetitions, loops,

wanderings, and sometimes meanderings (Ely, 2007). The restory is painstakingly crafted

from what participants shared with great attention paid to faithfully representing

participants' points of view (Ely, 2007). The aspects that are significant and presented in

the restory were significant because they stood out as impactful while questioning and re-

searching the field texts, and storytellers commented on them.

When working out the plot for a restory presentation, Connelly and Clandinin

(1990) warn narrative inquirers to be wary of the *Hollywood Plot* where everything

works out in the end. While devising the restory plot, I was aware that not everything

would tie together neatly in the end, both because narrative inquiry is always in the midst

and because the Rhizomatic collaboration experience involved a lot of unresolved

threads. Creating a *Hollywood Plot* would not have been an authentic representation of the stories contributed by participants.

The second research text is the analysis that follows the restory (Chapter 5). Chapter 5 includes an analysis of elements of the restory, incorporates story fragments that didn't make it into Chapter 4, and is a place to revisit the research puzzle and the associated mini-puzzles. Chapter 5 organizes and discusses themes and metathemes of this research. Themes are usually drawn from the analysis of particular *bins* of data coming from one or more participants (Wolcott, 2001). Metathemes, according to Ely (2007), are usually drawn from the entire body of data or from particularly powerful findings; they are overarching thematic statements that may be discussed in the light of the literature and participants' experiences. Themes flow from, and become answers to, my mini-puzzles, while metathemes are what emerged from a continuous re-search of the texts.

Chapter 5 is also an opportunity to dive deeper into aspects of the restory, discuss them, and connect them to existing research literature. It is an opportunity to meet our four storytellers to whom we are introduced to in Chapter 4, and dive into smaller side-stories, thoughts, and sentiments that, although of interest, did not make it into the restory. These stories from the *Rhizoverse* come both from conversations with the four storytellers as well as blogs composed during the Rhizocourses that were open and freely accessible on the internet. These short excerpts and momentary focuses on certain specifics serve as a means of highlighting important aspects of collaboration within the broader context in which the Rhizo-collaborations took place. Examining these smaller plots is an opportunity to use another narrative inquiry device that Connelly and

Clandinin (1990) call *burrowing*. Burrowing is a "focus on the event's emotional, moral, and aesthetic qualities [where] we then ask why the event is associated with these feelings and what their origins might be" (p. 11).

The final chapter of this document, Chapter 6, was originally going to be a part of Chapter 5. My original intent was to write a short *Future Research* section as part of that chapter. However, after reading Chapter 4, some reviewers recommended elaborating on Aliki's story as they found it to be an engaging narrative that allowed them to re-engage with their Rhizo MOOC wonderings. *How did it end? What happened to the story's unresolved threads? What was Aliki going to research?* To address these questions, I returned to Aliki's story with an epilogue. Thus, Chapter 6 follows Aliki as she is pondering her own dissertation journey. Through this fictional representation, I present potential paths of research, those that emerged from my research, as well as that Aliki could explore in hers. Chapter 5 does contain a brief wrap-up for my narrative inquiry, which includes future research directions, for audiences who may not be as comfortable with narrative; but Aliki's story also gets an epilogue.

From Field Texts to Research Texts: The Analytic Process

The analytic process that brings a narrative inquiry from field texts to research texts is never a straight line. Rather, it is a "complicated and iterative process, full of twists and turns" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 49). The analysis for my narrative inquiry is no exception. The purpose of this section is to provide a brief exposition on how I arrived at the research texts for this dissertation.

This research began with collecting field texts such as my autobiography, hosting conversations with storytellers, and creating transcripts from those conversations. Once I

proofread the conversation transcripts to ensure accuracy, I shared the transcripts with each storyteller to both verify the transcript, disambiguate the inaudibles, and hence poorly transcribed pieces of the conversation, and to allow storytellers to add additional information in the margins if they so wished. This type of information could be things that they thought of *after* our conversation, or aspects that they could build upon after reading their transcript.

Once this member-check was complete, my own analysis began. I specify *my own* analysis here because as I conversed with my storytellers, an undercurrent of analysis during the conversation was inevitable as they recounted their experiences in the Rhizo MOOCs and the Rhizo-collaborations and subjected those experiences through the analytic lenses that had been developed by stepping back from those events.

Initially, my analysis started as a waterfall model, proceeding from autobiography to transcript 1, then to transcript 2, then to transcript 3, and finally to transcript 4; and in all of the interim steps, analytic memos were drafted for these field texts, as well as reflexive memoing that allowed me to keep my emergent ideas and *hunches* separate from the field text analysis memos. Being in the position of researcher-as-participant did provide me with a different understanding of the events that occurred, as compared to a researcher who was not a participant, because I had experiences in these shared milieus. While this understanding can enhance the analysis, it can also unjustly skew it if the researcher is not cognizant of possible bias. For this reason, I also kept reflexive memos that interrogated my own experiences and provided a space in which I could critically cross-examine emergent findings against my own thoughts on the subject.

Once I completed that first pass-through, the subsequent iterations of this process resembled a weave. This weave was created as I jumped back and forth between field texts and interim texts. For instance, while reading something in transcript 3, I might be reminded of something in transcript 4 and transcript 1, so I would jump to that transcript to verify connections, or to make a note that connected various narrative threads. This would also prompt me to examine previously created memos and make note of any connections between memos on the transcripts, and between transcripts and my own reflexive memos, as well as make connections to the research literature that I had encountered.

Research literature factored into this process in two ways as part of this analytic phase. First, there was an aspect of "I remember reading something about this by *Author et al.*" which would prompt me to re-search the literature to examine those connections to existing publications from articles and books that I had already read as part of the work conducted for Chapter 2. The second way in which the research literature factored into this part of the analytic process was with "*I wonder…*" statements. For example, if I saw a potential thread emerging on the subject of trust, a corresponding *I wonder* statement would inquire "I wonder if there is research on the impact of trust in collaborative relationships?". These *I wonder* statements were prompts to conduct new searches for relevant research on a topic; searches which I might have not conducted before. Additionally, *I wonder* statements were used to seek out additional types of field texts, such as blogs, and to create field text collection instruments, such as the final survey. Once these additional field texts were collected, they were subsequently analyzed as part of that iterative weave described above. This process is demonstrated in Figure 1.
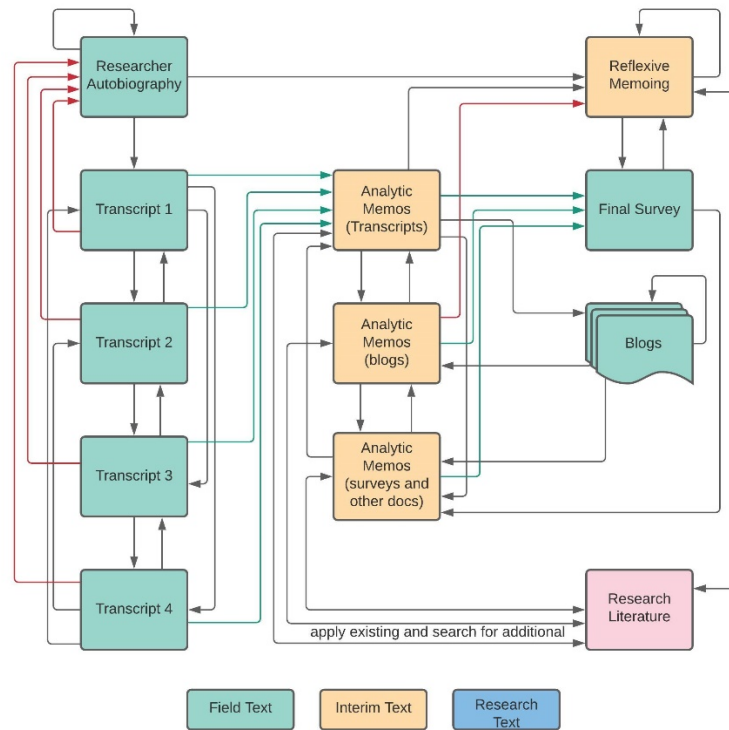
Figure 1. Analysis Process (Part 1)

This analytic process weave served both as an iterative pathway through which to examine the field texts and create the interim texts. The weave also served as a process that used various texts to triangulate emerging research findings. Once a snapshot of this metaphorical parade emerged, I began to write the fictionalized restory for Chapter 4. The chapter underwent several revisions both as I re-searched the memos and triangulated across various documents, and as I contacted my storytellers to member-check the story. The restory was not only checked for accuracy, i.e., how well it represented individual storytellers, but also invited storytellers to suggest additions that they think would make the story better. Additionally, I received feedback from a Rhizo MOOCs participant who was not one of my storytellers to ensure that the restory made sense to them within their participation contexts. Additional feedback was obtained as part of my dissertation

advising where story elements that might confuse a non-Rhizo participant could be addressed.

Once the restory was in its final form, I started working on Chapter 5 which was conceived as the research text to discuss elements that emerged in the story; as well as to highlight a few of those elements to make them more salient and to tie them to the research literature.   The process of writing Chapter 5 was also iterative and complex. With each re-read of the restory, and with each re-searching of the field texts and interim texts, additional ideas emerged. These additional ideas pointed to further literature to be retrieved, analyzed, and then incorporated into the analytic research weave. Stated simply, with each iteration the number of paths that became available were more than one researcher could reasonably follow in a single research project. Each dive into a story generated many other stories that could be relived and retold. This is where the notion of a snapshot is helpful to guide the narrative inquirer. It is important to keep in mind that a narrative inquiry does not examine *the entire* experience, but rather a snapshot of the lived experience of participants in the metaphorical parade, and that experience is moderated and influenced by factors in that parade (e.g., fellow parade participants) as well as outside of it (e.g., the audience in the crowds or the type of route the parade takes).

Research texts are constructed with readability in mind; readability that benefits undefined audiences who are most likely not familiar with the specific site, contexts, and participants of the research. These research texts are also created with the understanding that these snapshots still exist *in the midst*. Thus, they are incomplete by nature. Clandinin (2013) reminds us that research texts "do not have the final answers, because

narrative inquirers do not come with questions" (p. 51). The knowledge developed from a narrative inquiry "is textured by particularity and incompleteness" (p.52). In understanding and embracing that incompleteness, the narrative inquirer's goal is to highlight connections that emerged as they worked together with their storytellers in this process that led to the creation of research texts; which in turn allow their readers to bring their own past experiences as they read the research texts. Through research texts, the narrative inquirer can both determine how congruent the narratives are with the contexts in which they were obtained and allow the reader to bring in their own wonderings as they engage with the research texts.

Finally, once Chapter 5 was complete, I wrote Chapter 6 which serves as an epilogue to the restory presented in Chapter 4, but also presents additional areas for future research that emerged from this study. Chapter 6 emerged as an additional chapter after two critical events occurred. First, during the member-checking and feedback phases of Chapter 4, individuals inquired about Aliki (the protagonist) and wondered how her story concluded. A second critical incident came when some of the storytellers, and others in my immediate environment who are pursuing PhDs, identified with Aliki's story in searching for a good problem to research in their dissertations. They often used the phrase "*I wish I knew _x_ before _y_*" where they often shared something they learned as part of the process of dissertating that would have been helpful to know before they started. While Aliki's story is also *in the midst* and Narrative Inquirers should resist the temptation of creating a *Hollywood plot,* an epilogue provided an opportunity to examine some meta-elements of this research process. These elements not only guide readers

toward future research possibilities but also provide useful signposts to future doctoral students. The culmination of those analytic processes is illustrated in Figure 2.
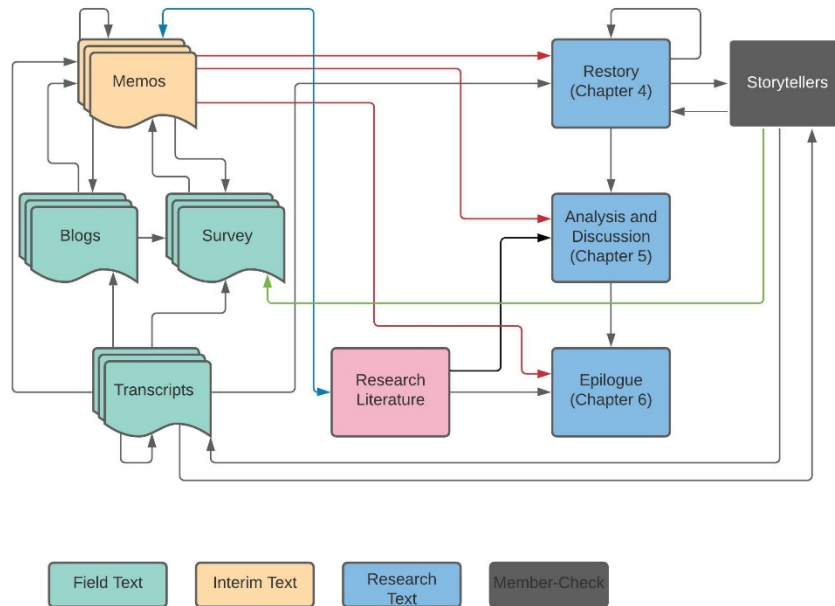
Figure 2. Analysis Process (Part 2)

Validity and Trustworthiness

Through the aforementioned field text collection procedures and research design, I sought to increase the trustworthiness of the research through means of increasing credibility, dependability, and confirmability of findings while attempting to minimize bias on the interpretation of field texts based on my own experiences. A key point to keep in mind in a narrative inquiry, as in other qualitative research designs, is that "we are not objective inquirers. We are relational inquirers, attentive to the intersubjective, relational, and embedded spaces in which lives are lived out. We do not stand metaphorically outside the inquiry but are part of the phenomenon under study" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 24).

Implementing credibility, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is a twofold task: first, one must "carry out the inquiry in such a way that the probability that the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced" (p. 296) and second, one must "demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having the approval of the constructors of the multiple realities being studied" (p. 296). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) summarize Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work on attaining credibility when they write that credibility could be achieved through prolonged engagement in the field, using triangulation, conducting member-checking, examining negative cases, and conducting peer debriefing, which means "exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner akin to cross-examination, in order to test honesty, working hypotheses and to identify next steps in the research" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 185).

Dependability is a measure of the degree to which research findings are consistent and can be repeated. Cohen et al. (2011), citing Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Anfara et al. (2002), indicate that approaches for increasing dependability are member-checks, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement in the field, and reflexive journaling.

Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality of the findings. In other words, confirmability is the extent to which the reported findings are shaped by the respondents and not the bias of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose a confirmability audit, triangulation, and reflexive journaling as a means of improving confirmability.

In my narrative inquiry, trustworthiness was designed to be approached through five methods: member-checking, a reflexive autobiography, an audit trail, memos, and through a triangulation of the various field texts and interim texts.

Member-checking is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a process "whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholder groups from whom the data were originally collected" (p. 314) and constitutes the first approach to establishing trustworthiness. Member-checking was part of the conversation transcript review, interim field texts that storify individual participant stories, and the restory of all member contributions.

Transcripts were generated automatically by the synchronous conferencing platform (zoom) and were checked for accuracy. The corrected transcripts were sent to participants for verification. During this process, participants were also able to add any additional information that they wished to contribute and could clarify aspects of the transcript. It is at this stage that additional texts began entering the field text collection as additional information was suggested by participants. Similarly, during the interim text creation of the restory, participants were invited to read the completed restory draft and comment on the story and the formatting. Participants were informed which character was based on their contributions and they could suggest changes or ask questions. It is also at this point that participants were invited to submit any desired annotations (e.g., story footnotes and side notes) or images that they wished to include in my restory. This was an option that would enable participants to include elements that they felt should be there, and it simulated, to some extent, their past collaborative experiences.

The final survey also served as a member-checking instrument. The survey brought together elements and threads from every participant's conversation and enabled me to get clarification and validation on my interpretations. It was also a way of enabling participants to ask their questions regarding my research topic to other participants via a

mediated means. Member-checking, in narrative inquiry, is not a one-time event. Due to the collaborative nature of narrative inquiry member-checking is a recursive action that involves ongoing back and forth exchange (Clandinin, 2013).

The reflexive autobiography was another design approach for ensuring trustworthiness. This was one of the field texts collected. Another method was the creation of memos as field texts. Memos can serve as a means of "conversing with yourself" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). This memoing conversation with yourself allows for the consideration of new ideas and concepts (Charmaz, 2006), and provides interim texts which prove vital in cases in which rival explanations arise from the data. The reflexive memos were a means of bracketing. Bracketing is a process where a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance any presuppositions, biases, assumptions, or previous experiences to see and describe the essence of a specific phenomenon (Given, 2008). It was also a place for me to continue to explore my own experiences of collaborating in the Rhizos beyond my autoethnography. The memos were also the space where I noted "rival explanations" (Yin, 2014, p. 36) and played devil's advocate with my emergent understanding.

My research approach also included different levels of peer debriefing throughout the process. Peer debriefing is a process where the researcher recruits a peer, who is not involved in the research project, to aid in probing the researcher's thinking around some or all parts of the research process (Cohen et al., 2011; Given, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1984). During the proposal phase of this research project, my dissertation advisors and a local colleague played the role of the disinterested peers and helped me think through the methods and approaches. Once the restory text (chapter 4) was created and commented on by my storytellers, I also asked another central figure of the Rhizo MOOC community,

a person who was also a collaborator and one of those 15 potential research participants, if they would be willing to review the restory to see if it rang true to them. They reviewed my restory and gave it their approval.

Finally, triangulation between different field texts and interim texts, such as memos, verified transcripts of conversations with participants, and prolonged exposure with the subject served as a means of ensuring trustworthiness. An audit trail was part of this process as it was used to document how, and when, I engaged with the various field texts and interim texts.

In implementing the aforementioned trustworthiness evaluation process, my goal was to also have this process culminate in research texts that are not only trustworthy but also authentic. Authenticity is a qualitative research criterion developed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) and it's a criterion that runs concurrent to trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba created this term because the approaches that go into ensuring trustworthiness "do not [necessarily] ensure that stakeholder constructions have been collected and faithfully represented" (p. 245). One of the tenets of authenticity is fairness, which is conceived to be "a quality of balance; that is, all stakeholder views, perspectives, values, claims, concerns, and voices should be apparent in the text" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2005, p. 242). By inviting participants to review and comment on the restory, and inviting them to critique and add to it; and by inviting an external peer debriefer from the Rhizo community who was also a collaborator, this research text has taken steps to increase the authenticity of the constructed research texts.

Ethical Considerations

Josselson (2007) asserts that "ethical practice and ethical codes rest on the principles of assuring the free consent of participants to participate, guarding the confidentiality of the material, and protecting participants from any harm that may ensue from their participation" (p. 537). Narrative inquiry is markedly different from other research methods, including in its approach to ethical practice. Clandinin (2006) suggests:

> we need to imagine ethics as being about negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices. We need to learn how to make these stories of what it means to engage in narrative inquiry dependable and steady. We must do more than fill out required forms for institutional research ethics boards. (p. 52)

In narrative inquiry "there is a fluidity and recursiveness as inquirers compose research texts, negotiate them with participants, compose further field texts and recompose research texts" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 48). This fluidity demands ethical considerations that go beyond checklists; hence for Josselson (2007), in narrative inquiry ethics should not be procedural but rather reflexive, operating in adherence to ethical values rather than merely adhering to a priori behaviors.

Eligible participants who were invited to participate in my narrative inquiry were provided with an initial informed consent form (see Appendix A) which contained information about the study, the ability to opt into the study, and an acknowledgment that conversational interviews will be recorded. This consent form also provided information about the participant's right to withdraw. If a participant elected to exercise their right to leave the study, the information that they contributed would be removed from

consideration and further analysis *unless* it was intertwined in the restory to such a degree

that the removal of a story element wouldn't be feasible; for instance, if multiple

participants mentioned the same thing in their conversations the removal of the element

mentioned did not warrant the removal of that story strand. Participants could have left

the study at any time during the field text and interim text creation by notifying me by

email of their intent to withdraw.

As part of the consent form, participants could choose how they preferred to be

referred to in the study. The default was Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.; however,

participants could have chosen a pseudonym. Most participants did not state a

preference. One participant chose their real-world name, which posed challenges for

confidentiality. For this reason, gender-neutral names and they/them pronouns were used

in the research texts, as described in the previous sections.

I did not seek additional permissions for the use of blog posts. Participants who

shared blog posts, or other documents, with me during the field text collection shared

them under the auspices of the participant consent form since those artefacts emerged

from conversations with the participants. From the entry points provided to me by the

research participants during our conversations, I was able to access additional relevant

blog posts, which were freely available on the web; they related to Rhizo14 and Rhizo15

and I was able to explore those networks of connections, interactions, and ideas. It is

important to acknowledge that while blogs are publicly available on the internet, the

Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) indicates that privacy is something that is not

absolutely set in stone. The notion of privacy is contextual. As the AoIR's ethics

guidelines explain:

Individual and cultural definitions and expectations of privacy are ambiguous,

contested, and changing. People may operate in public spaces but maintain strong

perceptions or expectations of privacy. Or, they may acknowledge that the

substance of their communication is public, but that the specific context in which

it appears implies restrictions on how that information is - or ought to be - used by

other parties. (Markham & Buchanan, 2012, p. 6)

The private-public divide should be thought of as a continuum. Elm (2009)

describes the two ends of the spectrum as "public content would then be content that

concerns social matters, whereas private content concerns individuals' private lives as

separated from societal matters" (p. 80). Since the content of the blogs dealt with

teaching and learning within a broader community of learners in the Rhizo MOOCs and

their related activities - which interrogated ideas and praxis, not people - the content was

understood to be public content. Furthermore, available data such as blogs, tweets, and

Facebook posts that do not require a logon to access is similar to observational research

and there is no reasonable expectation of privacy. This is congruent with Tri-Council

Policy Articles 2.2, 2.3, and 10.3 (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014, p.

145). That said, some aspects of the blog field texts did inform secondary plots and

characters in my research texts. For this reason, everyone involved, whether they were an

author of a blog post or someone that a blog post mentions, was assigned a gender-neutral

name for the restory, and the pronouns they/them were used. Additionally, there are no

direct quotes from blogs and story threads in the restory are not verbatim recounts

provided by participants.

Research Limitations

While knowledge developed from a narrative inquiry "leads less to generalization and certainties…and more toward wondering about and imagining alternative possibilities" (Clandinin, 2013, p.52), it is important to mention some limitations of this research in order to aid the reader in better assessing the transferability of this research. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "transferability inferences cannot be made by an investigator who knows *only* the sending context" (p. 297, italics in original), meaning that a researcher who reports on their findings cannot know a priori how those findings might apply to the context of the reader's environment.

First, participants in the Rhizo MOOCs, which were cMOOCs, were a self-selecting group of individuals. Participants in cMOOCs have a good grasp of technology and navigating the webs of online resources. cMOOCs are typically advertised through social media and propagate through the use of blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and other social platforms. This type of information retrieval skill, and a facility with technology, may not be something that learners in other learning contexts possess.

Second, the storytellers in this research were not new to MOOCs. They had previous MOOC experience and they were individuals who had completed at least a master's degree, with many either having completed a doctoral degree or in progress toward one. This would seem to suggest that participants of these MOOCs, and more specifically the collaborations that emerged from these MOOCs, had developed some processes for regulating their own learning. Part of this self-regulation was to seek out the means to expand their personal learning networks beyond their geographically proximal networks. A personal learning network is "a manifestation of a learner's informal learning

processes via the Web" (Martindale & Dowdy, 2010, p. 181), which uses "tools, artefacts, processes, and physical connections that allow learners to control and manage their learning" (Couros, 2010, p. 125).

Third, the collaborations that took place in these Rhizo MOOCs were not bound by the pressures that may come with an academic calendar. In the Rhizo-collaborations, participants could form teams and explore their team dynamics in an environment that was free from the pressures to perform during a bound time period. While the Rhizo MOOCs were limited to six weeks, the collaborations far outlived the MOOCs, and individual collaboration products, such as published papers, took as much time as they needed to be ready. Some lines of inquiry were also dropped without seriously impacting the group dynamics. If educators wish to apply these findings to traditional classrooms, they would need to examine not just learner characteristics, but also environmental contexts to ensure that they are similar enough to the contexts and learners presented here and findings are thus more transferable.

Finally, the frame of reference for conducting and understanding this research is centered on an Anglo-American understanding of the experience of collaboration in the Rhizo MOOC context. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are other epistemological approaches to analyzing narrative (Kim, 2016), such as feminist epistemologies (e.g., Alcoff & Potter, 2013; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1993; hooks, 1984, 2000; Lather, 1991) and indigenous and decolonizing epistemologies (e.g., Bendix, Müller, & Ziai, 2020; Mason, Mason, Palahicky, Rodriguez de France, 2018; Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000; Smith, 2012). Approaching the analysis

of narrative from a different epistemological framework would potentially illuminate different ways of knowing and understanding of these experiences.

Roadmap to Research Texts: A Timeline

To conclude this chapter, the pathway from field texts to research texts was a research journey that culminated in providing a sense of how Rhizo-collaborators experienced their collaborations. Narrative Research aims to provide a sense of the experience lived (Ely, 2007). Ely (2007) further posits that rather than reflecting *the* reality narratives, with the help of the reader, create a version of reality. This "true for now" quality of these research texts derive trustworthiness from how other researchers and practitioners rely on them as a basis for practice, research, or theorizing (Craig, 2009b, p. 603). In the end, "it's not the fragments that move us but a wholeness that speaks to the mind and heart" (Ely, 2007, "When All is Said and Done", para. 8).

The analysis portion of my research project was a six-month process. It was recursive and involved a collaborative sense of search and re-search. Invitations to participate in the research and initial questionnaires were sent out by email in July. Conversations, transcription, and verification of transcripts occurred starting in August and going through mid-September. Field text analysis began in August, as soon as they were collected, and proceeded through mid-November when the initial drafts of the restory were created and various metathemes began to emerge. Between November and late December, the restory was continually edited as field texts and interim texts were re-searched. Additionally, I sought and received input from my storytellers and advisors, and the restory (Chapter 4) was completed in January. The Analysis chapter (Chapter 5) was composed in December and January after completing a re-search of field texts, interim

texts, and returning to the research literature. Finally, Chapter 6 was completed in mid-

January.

Chapter 4: Aliki in #Rhizo24

Foreword

Dear reader,

This chapter is one of the two research texts that I produced for my narrative inquiry. This restory represents facets of the lived experience of participants in a rhizomatic learning community such as rhizo14 and rhizo15. As there are many actors in this story, created from the contributed stories of my research storytellers, this narrative is *multivoiced* (Riessman & Speedy, 2012). The protagonist, Aliki, is an amalgam of common points, plots, and sentiments expressed by my storytellers during our conversations. Aliki is also the person through which we, as an audience, explore my research puzzle as she meets people that represent the four research participants in this fictional rhizo24 experience.

The chapter should be read and interpreted as a story. It also uses some mechanics that resemble the dynamics employed during the various collaborations that took place in rhizo14 and rhizo15. Some aspects have been changed for ease of presentation; for example, instead of comments in the margins, I've used explanatory footnotes. The comments feature of Microsoft Word does not provide an elegant solution when printing a Word document with comments or when it is converted to a PDF. I have not applied APA formatting in this chapter so that it visually appears, and reads, like a narrative rather than a research report. While this restory is crafted using the field texts and interim texts gathered and analyzed during my research process, and while it is a research output, I also wanted to immerse the reader in the collaboration narrative.

It is important to keep in mind that all narratives are, fundamentally, co-constructed (Salmon & Riessman, 2008). This co-construction occurs during many parts of the research process: during conversations with storytellers, during the researcher's analysis phase, during the member-checking phase, and ultimately when a reader, like you, reads and interprets this narrative. The presentation of the narrative in this form, in addition to protecting individual identities, also invites the reader to provide their own layer of analysis and to compare and contrast this narrative with their own contexts to make their

own determinations about applicability. Storytelling enables professionals to render their formulations recognizable to colleagues (Riessman & Speedy, 2012), and that is the aim of this restory.

~AK

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January 10, 2024

Today seemed like any other Wednesday to Aliki. She got up at six a.m. central time, a fact that she always had to mention in casual conversation to whoever she met online because her international friends were more familiar with the eastern seaboard of the United States. People always seemed to know someone from New York, or Boston, or even Atlanta, but no one from her little patch of the US of A.   Half-awake, she put the kettle on to boil some water and ground some coffee beans for her coffee maker. That smell of fresh ground coffee always played on her olfactory senses and seemed to get her mind in gear quicker, allowing her to do some work while the water was boiling. While waiting for the kettle to do its thing and boil the water, she jumps into her news and social media. Fumbling with her phone she notices a Twitter alert. A number of her friends had retweeted something.

I wonder what it is, she pondered as one of her eyebrows was involuntarily raised.

It must be important if Sandy and others bothered to retweet it, she thought and immediately commanded Twitter to display the tweet.

The tweet was a retweet of Dave Cormier. It wasn't a long tweet by any stretch of the imagination. It only had four simple words…

Well, four words and some emoji. Do those count as words?

An immediate sense of curiosity washed over her, even before she'd have her first sip of coffee. But wait…maybe it was the lack of caffeination, but doesn't a "save the date" always include a…uhhh…a date *to* save? This tweet was lacking some really important information! It seems like other alumni of the various "Rhizos" over the years felt a similar sense of curiosity.

Perhaps this was a "typical Dave" moment. A moment meant to get us to think. As much as she wanted to follow along this rhizo24 rabbit hole, Aliki simply hadn't had enough coffee to explore this. Besides, she was halfway through her third year as a PhD student and she needed to focus a bit more on putting forth a proposal for her dissertation committee. Rhizo-anything would have to wait. After all, it had been two years since the last Rhizo, so rhizo *could* wait. She could hear the coffee kettle making the clicking noise that indicated that the water had come to a boil. Coffee beckons!

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[1] Images in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are mostly created by the author using tools such as https://www.tweetgen.com/ or meme creation web applications such as https://imgflip.com/memegenerator. Images that are not created by the author include a footnote with source information. All images used under fair use guidelines.

January 15, 2024

It had been a few days since that cryptic *save the date* tweet. By today the tweet had been retweeted several hundred times by alumni of the rhizo22 course, and by many others. The number seemed more than the number of participants of the rhizo22 course, at least from what Aliki recalled. Maybe they were alumni from rhizo14 and rhizo15. In addition to the retweets, doing a search on the hashtag, #rhizo24, already yielded a lot of tweets and exchanges between people on Twitter. Some of it was speculation about what #rhizo24 would be. Others seemed to have already jumpstarted the course by doing asynchronous Twitter chats. Aliki didn't have much time to engage today. The semester starts today and she needed to get going!

Later that afternoon, after the workday ended, Aliki was sitting at a corner of the cafeteria looking out at the greenery of the campus quad. She was enjoying her customary afternoon tea and cake. She needed her caffeine and sugar before heading to an evening class. Charlie, one of her cohort mates, approached her and sees that she is looking an article over - called "Rhizomatic Learning".

Curious, Charlie thinks to himself and asks if he can sit down.

Alice waives to him offering the empty seat.

"What's Rhizomatic Learning? Is it like, how plants learn?" asks Charlie.

Aliki almost spit her tea out. It was a funny way of framing rhizomatic learning. She takes a deep breath, pondering how to give Charlie a succinct answer to this complex question. She looks out at the quad and responds: "I am not sure if I can explain it very cogently but I'll give you the elevator pitch: Rhizomatic learning is a variety of pedagogical practices that are rooted in the work of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari… specifically in their work in the book *one thousand plateaus*. The original is a bit of a bear to read IMO, but from what I understand, it was originally meant to be an application of post-structural thought to the field of education but more recently it has evolved as a methodology for net-enabled education. It's in the same pantheon as *connectivism* and those other theories."

Charlie looked perplexed and asked: "a potential path for your dissertation research?"

"Not quite – at least not yet," Aliki responded, "but you never know. I saw this cryptic tweet about rhizo24 and it got me thinking".

Charlie looked a bit perplexed. "Rhizo-what-now?"

"Rhizomatic Learning 2024" Aliki said with a bit of a smile. "Do you remember Rhizo22?"

"That doesn't ring any bells…" said Charlie, inviting a further explanation of this rhizo thing.

Aliki perked up, eager to explore this rabbit hole with Charlie: "OK, so do you remember the guest speaker we had in EDUID801? The person who spoke about *Virtually Connecting*?"

"Vaguely, that course feels like a whirlwind."

"OK, let me rewind a bit. In 801 we had a guest speaker come talk to us about scholarship on the web, and that discussion lead to this thing called *virtually connecting*."

"which is…?"

"Virtually Connecting is a way to *enliven* - their word, not mine - virtual participation in academic conferences, and provides a means to widen access to a fuller conference experience for those who cannot be physically present at those conferences. Does this ring any bells?" asked Aliki.

"A bit…, but go on. How does it work?" said Charlie.

"It all happens through a community of volunteers and it's free to participate" continued Aliki. "There usually is an *on-site buddy* who wrangles the on-site logistics, and an *online buddy* who takes care of the online logistics and facilitates the conversation. Basically, this allows virtual conference participants to meet and talk with conference

presenters and attendees in a way that feels like those spontaneous hallway conversations."

Charlie nodded. "Yeah…I'm a bit of an introvert, so I don't spontaneously strike up those conversations, but I like being a fly on the wall. I think I've seen some of the recordings as part of our courses."

"OK," Aliki continues, "so, after that guest lecture I explored *VConnecting* a bit further, viewed some of their recent saved streams on YouTube, and one day I decided to participate synchronously – just on a whim. It was rather interesting! The conference was in the US, but there were people on the call from Greece, Egypt, Germany, Brazil, Nigeria, and a few other places. After that, I looked up the participants on Twitter and started to follow them. This was so informative that I did this a few times that semester."

"Alright, cool…but where does rhizo fit in?" Charlie asks a bit perplexed.

"Ah! Well! It turns out that *VConnecting* was an outgrowth from these original *rhizomatic learning* courses. Not a direct lineage type-of-thing. Think about it more of a *necessity is the mother of all invention* angle." Aliki pauses and makes a thinking gesture…

"It turns out," Aliki continues, "that the founders of VConnecting were in the original rhizo courses and when they were presenting their work at academic conferences not everyone could make it. So, VConnecting was born out of the need to beam in participants *not just* for their presentation, but also for other parts of the conference experience! In any case, back in February 2021 there was another similar *batsignal*…or should I say *rhizosignal?*... that came across Twitter. Many VConnecting folks were talking about it, but it also came from this other *experience* I had participated in called DS106."

"Is that one of those MOOCs?" asked Charlie.

"Uh…yeah…I'd say it is, but don't call it a MOOC. It seems like a lot of *DS106*ers don't quite like the *M-word* being associated with their learning community. From what I've

been able to piece together DS106 came up around the same time as the early MOOCs, but they were separate strands of similar explorations and experiments in open learning."

Charlie nodded, but it was clear that things weren't exactly crystal clear – at least from a theory point of view. He looked up from his phone, where he had been googling DS106, and asked "When did you participate in DS106? It looks cool."

Aliki responded: "between the end of my masters and starting this program. I needed something to keep me on a learning path and I stumbled upon it. I also came across another *make-style* community called *CLMOOC* – although I don't think it's a MOOC either – and another community called *equity unbound*. They were good ways to expand on what I had learned, and learn things that I wouldn't necessarily find in a conventional classroom. I think I had come across our guest speaker for 801 somewhere in those circles before, but I don't remember."

"Anyway – back to my *rhizostory*," Aliki exclaimed. "VConnecting folks were tweeting about rhizo22, some DS106ers were tweeting this too. I might have even seen it in Stephen Downes' *OLDaily*[2] newsfeed. So, I thought, why not sign-up and see what this is all about? I've never had the learning experience of being a learner in an actual connectivist MOOC!"

"Where do you find the time?!" asked Charlie, not necessarily expecting an answer.

"I don't know, it just happened, and things worked out. So, after getting on that rhizo mailing list and getting some start-up information, the course started sometime in June. Cormier sent out some informational crumbs between February and June on Twitter…"

"Wait, Cormier? Isn't that the MOOC guy?" interjected Charlie.

"Uh yeah, he coined the term '*MOOC*' back in 2008 when he worked with Siemens and Downes on the first connectivist MOOC. He also originated the *learners are the curriculum* and the past rhizo courses. Anyway, Cormier posted some periodic

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[2] The OLDaily is an actual newsfeed. It may be found on the web here:
https://www.downes.ca/news/OLDaily.htm

ponderings and learning provocations through the course mailing list, and Twitter folk who were signed up would discuss and blog a bit about these provocations. To me, it seemed like the course had *already* started, but we were still a month or so away from the *official* start of the course. Dave, from what I gathered, had developed a reputation of a bit of a trickster, so maybe this was one of his *tricks* or experiments."

"Someone should send him a T-Shirt with Loki, or the Cheshire Cat, on it…" mumbled Charlie.

"In any case, I participated a bit in the Twitter back-and-forths for #rhizo22 but not a ton because my mind was firmly occupied by our required EDUID seminars. I think I lucked out that rhizo22 started in June when I had more *free* time on my hands."

At that moment Aliki's phone buzzed. It was a Twitter alert. Apparently, the learning trickster had struck again, and people were retweeting! This time with an actual date:

 "What an odd mystery," said Aliki out loud, sounding more than a tad perplexed.

"What is it?" asked Charlie.

"Well, there is finally a date for the upcoming rhizo course, but it's only a week-long."

"Why is that odd?"

"Rhizo22 was 5 weeks in length, and from what I recall rhizo14 and rhizo15 were about the same" replied Aliki.

"and what's this plane emoji all about?" she continued…

"perhaps a mystery for another day, we should be heading to our next seminar which starts in 15 minutes," said Charlie as he was packing up his bag, getting ready to head to the seminar.

"Perhaps you're right," Aliki said, *but what the heck is Dave up to this time?* she pondered quietly as she looked out at the green campus quad. Dave liked to pique people's interests as a means of engagement, but this was a mystery to solve another time. Schoolwork was calling.

February 29, 2024

It has been a while since the *actual* save-the-date announcement for rhizo24 on Twitter. Aliki had decided to use the TAGS explorer, a tool that harvests openly available tweets using a keyword, to keep track of what was said about the upcoming course. Or was it an event? Or…was it a community? The dripped messages from Dave sure did spur a lot of discussion around the topic. Another perk of harvesting tweets this early on was that you could use this data to start conducting research by doing a social network analysis. This is something she'd come across while doing a lit review in one of her past seminars.

After the conversation with Charlie last month, Aliki had decided that for this seminar she'd present on rhizo since it seemed that her cohort wasn't really all that aware of the subject. She could present on *her* rhizo experience in rhizo22, but she thought's she'd work backward, like a learning archaeologist, to find out more about the first two rhizomatic learning courses in order to set the scene.

Finding information about the first rhizos requires a bit of digital archaeology. She started by seeing what Google remembered about rhizo14, which was a surprising

amount! There were a number of videos on YouTube, blog posts, and even some academic articles that were published that had rhizo14 as a keyword. Aliki was intrigued. She was not previously aware that research had been conducted in past rhizos, and she even recognized some of the names! In fact, some of these people were people that she already followed on Twitter but didn't know all that well. What a pleasant surprise! She also noticed that most of the research published had multiple authors.

What was the story behind this? She pondered to herself. *There must be a good story! Maybe a thread to follow a bit later.* She saves the articles she comes across to *Zotero*[3] and continues the exploration. Dave's Rhizo14 summative blog post was quite authoritative on the *planned* course. The course was titled "Rhizomatic Learning – The community is the curriculum," and Dave wrote that he was interested in pursuing this idea he had. The self-imposed *pressure* of inviting others to play in the rhizomatic sandbox was a motivation for him to gather up his thoughts and ideas. The course was originally planned on a platform called *Peer2Peer University*, which seemed to be an early MOOC provider, but quickly moved into many other distributed spaces.

"Look at the topics" breathed Aliki as she was reading the blog post; some of the ones that popped out to her were "Cheating as Learning," "planned obsolescence," and "is books making us stupid?" With titles like this no wonder Dave got the reputation of a trickster. The course was planned from January 14, 2014 to February 24, 2014. The end date appears to be somewhat of a question mark as Dave didn't really plan for an adjournment – or so it seemed.

Aliki did a few other searches to see if the P2PU course was still available. Jackpot! The first page of Google results indicated that a number of weeks were available! *Let's explore!* thought Aliki as she clicked on "Week 1 – Cheating as Learning"…only to be confronted with a page with lots of whitespace and the following text:

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[3] Zotero is a free reference manager software, available at https://www.zotero.org/

502 Bad Gateway

nginx/1.13.3

 "Darn! Looks like the old P2PU is no longer available" said Aliki to herself. Maybe it's a PHP error that will resolve itself…maybe not. Aliki needed a Plan B.

"Maybe archive.org will have something…"

"Nope…"

"Hmmmm…" Aliki mumbled as she was tapping her fingers on the desk, thinking of her next move.

"What if I google *week 1 p2pu rhizomatic learning*? What will I get then?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed with a broad smile! While the topics themselves didn't have any broad explanations, she was able to summon her inner Indiana Jones to unearth at least some lost treasures from the internet's forgotten past. Through a variety of searches (and the memory of Google), it appears that participants extended the course by another six weeks. The P2PU course was open for editing by participants, so they were able to add in their own topics. From what she could tell the topics for Weeks 8 through 12 were:

- Week 7: The Lunatics are taking over the Asylum
- Week 8: Demobbing Soldiers
- Week 9: Why do We Need Lurkers?
- Week 10: Creativity: the art of thriving in arid environments
- Week 11: Powerful thoughts
- Week 12 ½: MOOC Missionaries

Aliki wasn't sure if there was a week 12 and Week 12 ½ was an inside joke, or if they decided to skip whole numbers and jokingly do something else. *Sadly, the internet doesn't record all things and some things are lost in the digital sands of time* she thought to herself. She also pondered if people who were in rhizo14 were going to be in rhizo24. It would be the ten-year anniversary for them. Nostalgia is a powerful force. Could she further inquire then? Another thread to follow up later on…perhaps.

Aliki then turned her attention to rhizo15. This one seemed more of a mystery. It had an air of internet apocryphalness to it. She couldn't readily find much information on the web for this one. Her digital archaeologist skills were being put to the test! It seems as though Dave decided to be very *connectivist* in his 2015 implementation of the course. Rhizo14 had a launchpad each week on a MOOC platform, even though the discussions took place on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, blogs, heck – probably even Second Life – who knows? As an aside, *who remembers Second Life? Is that thing still around?* A Google search for rhizo15, on the other hand, yielded a lot of disconnected blog posts and no central place to connect from. Curious… Was Rhizo15 "designed" with the connectivist learner in mind? This made it really hard to find the places and spaces where people interacted!

Time passed as Aliki was exploring the *internet archive*, long-defunct Facebook groups, and chasing down the few live leads from Google that she could find. By luck, she came across a directory of blog posts! It appears that one of the Rhizo15 participants had put together a directory of blog posts, organized by weekly topic. This allowed her to pull on some additional threads and explore at least some of what the participants were discussing, and what Dave's original intentions were.   It seems like Dave gave the course the title *Rhizomatic learning, a practical guide*, but the Facebook group associated with Rhizo15 was titled *RhizoResillyence is becoming*. It seems like someone was having fun with words because *silly* was right there in the title. Either that or someone was as mad as a hatter when they were organizing this…

In any case, it appears that rhizo15 was also a six-week course, with the seventh week of participants setting sails for learning beyond Dave's six-week design. There was even a

fork of the original rhizo15 community titled *Rhizomatic learning - a theoretical discussion* on Facebook. The topics that they grappled with in 2015 were:

- Week 1: Learning Subjectives - designing for when you don't know where you're going
- Week 2: Learning is not a counting noun… so what should we count?
- Week 3: The Myth of Content
- Week 4: Can/Should we get rid of the idea of 'Dave'? How do we teach rhizomatically?
- Week 5: Is Community Learning and Invasive Species?
- Week 6: Rhizomatic learning, a practical guide
- Week 7: onward the rhizos grow…

Time passed and Aliki was endlessly scrolling through the rhizo14, rhizo15, and RhizoFork groups on Facebook that she found. She notices that rhizo14 had 287 members. Rhizo15 had 250 members, and the RhizoFork had 216 members. They were all quiet now, but echoes of the lively conversations are still visible in plain sight. Luckily some group administrator was still around and approved her membership, otherwise, she would have missed out on so much depth! *Thank you, nameless admin!* she thought.

And, there she saw names of people she recognized. Some from her own Rhizo22 experiences, some from Virtually Connecting, some from Equity Unbound, and others from academic papers that she had read. The Rhizoworld was getting populated, and these folks were the Rhizocitizens! Aliki had her *AHA!!! Moment*.

She then noticed that the sun was setting.

Aliki noticed that a caterpillar had parked itself on the top of her laptop screen. She was so engaged in her digital archeology that she hadn't even noticed. One of the pleasures of unbound learning, you get to learn out in nature. She gently picks up her learning co-pilot, sets it on the step of a nearby flower, and heads home. Long day at work, long day learning!

There are more rhizomes to explore!

March 6, 2024

Aliki's turn to present at her doctoral seminar was fast approaching, buuuuut…she was still creatively procrastinating reading through the intricate threads in the old rhizomatic Facebook groups, following those threads to blogs, and blog comments, onto Twitter, and then back into Facebook. In her mind, some of the clusters of activity had already started to form. She saw connections. Some looked like Bozkurt's Twitter Social Network Analysis diagram[4], and others were a bit different. She had saved this diagram in her OneNote notebook for future reference. Perhaps another thread to follow later on…

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[4] Image is the work of Aras Bozkurt, retrieved from: https://altc.alt.ac.uk/blog/2015/07/what-was-rhizome15/#gref

Network connections among Twitter users for #Rhizo15 by Aras BOZKURT
SNA for #rhizo15 by Aras BOZKU

NodeXL (http://nodexl.codeplex.com) from the Social Media Research Foundation (http://www.smrfoundation.org)

bzzzzt   **bzzzt**

Her phone's vibrating broke her concentration. It was a tweet, or rather more precisely a notification of people liking and retweeting something that Dave had posted. Discussion about rhizo24 had been going on strong these past couple of weeks as participants started shaping the discussion. Some names in the discussion were familiar rhizo22 names and some she recognized from the old Facebook groups. So what did this tweet say? Aliki says out loud "Alright Dave, what do you have for us today?" and taps on the notification to see what it was all about.

Dave Cormier ✓
@rhizomagic

#rhizo24 in Ontario 🍁 – Blend the Rhizome! See more here: rhizomatic.net/rhizo24Info 🏕️⛺🔥🌍🎸✍️📝🎶🎼🧁🎉🥲

6:04 PM · Mar 6, 2024 · Twitter Web App

141 Retweets **11K** Likes

"Uuuuhhhh, what?" said Aliki perplexed. A rhizo… *on location*?

There was a link, so Aliki followed that to see what the deets[5] were.

So here's what the trickster-in-chief wrote:

Not our first Rodeo, but not the same ol' Rhizome either!

Dear Friends,

So here we are! The 10th anniversary of the course formerly known as "Rhizomatic Learning – the community is the curriculum" is upon us. I say *formerly known as* because we've been referring to it as *rhizo14* all these years. I thought it would be fun to create a space for the communal network of knowmads that has emerged over the last ten years. This time around I thought I'd blend the rhizome. A family friend (and big rhizofan) has loaned us the use of their

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[5] Deets, \ ˈdēts \, noun. An informal word for "details"

campgrounds in Ontario for a week, so I thought that it would be interesting to take the camping metaphor I mentioned in rhizo14, 15, and 22 and make it an IRL thing.

Space is limited since we are in person, but there is a virtual component to it (hence the blend). If you can't make it in person, there will be virtual rooms to join and these rooms will be connected to physical locations, so people who are local can mingle with people in cyberspace. The entirety of the campgrounds is covered by robust WiFi, so all your devices can also act as impromptu *buddy* devices (to borrow a VConnecting term) to bring people in campfire chats.

For some of you, like those who started the course *months* early, rhizo24 will simply be an extension of your normal practice on the internet. You'll find familiar faces who make references to previous learning events online (including rhizo14, rhizo15, and rhizo22). You already have places on the web from which you speak and connect with others. Many of you are already familiar with this whole rhizo thing. For other folks this will be a new journey, you'll be the only person you know in the course and you'll be, frankly, lost. Most will fall somewhere in between those two places, and you will turn to me for guidance. You might be thinking things like: "This is the biggest waste of time ever, what the heck is this?" or, you might be thinking "I don't know what I'm supposed to do" or perhaps "Who is driving this bus? That Dave Guy has no idea what he's doing!"

If you're returning to rhizo (welcome back!) you might have an idea of how things work, but it's always interesting to reconceptualize and problematize what we do. If you're brand new (welcome!), think of this course as a camp you can visit and stay for as long as you like. This year's camp has a theme 'a blended view' of rhizomatic learning. That means that this year we're hoping to talk about how Rhizomatic Learning can and does happen in a variety of blends. Blended classrooms, in a blended make-circle, blended ability, and interest groups, and so

on. This blending is new to me too, so we'll all be learning! (and, no…, I don't have the answers 🙂😲)

If you're new, you will notice that we have some frequent flyers on RhizoAir. Some of them may actually come with RhizoSwag like #rhizo14/15/22 T-shirts, stickers, temporary tattoos, you name it. We've really built a community over the years. Keep in mind that *They are not the boss of you*. What we talk about at camp is really up to you. You get to choose what you think and work about. The community (you folks, hopefully) is the curriculum. This is a new rhizo.

Why am I (still) doing this?

I've been working with the idea of rhizomatic learning for close to 20 years now. I get the feeling that learning is a very messy place, and the story of the rhizome is one that I have found super useful in explaining things I've seen happen in learning spaces. This is my research lab, in a sense, and y'all are researching along with me (if you want to).

What will happen in this course?

I'm not sure yet! I know that I will post the first learning challenge on August 1st. This is before the in-person component, and I know that it's also right before the *Digital Pedagogy Lab*[6] that's taking place in Toronto that week, so I am hoping for some cross-connections there. I'll post the provocation in the email newsletter [sign-up here][7], I'll tweet it to #rhizo14, I'll post it on the course blog, and I'll post it in the Facebook group (I see that some eager participants have already created a Rhizo24 Facebook group, so I'll join that group if it's OK with you 🙂). What happens after that we'll find out together. The same goes for our in-person

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[6] "Digital Pedagogy Lab is an international professional development gathering for educators committed to issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, critical digital pedagogy, and imagining a new future for education. The Lab is a space for teachers, students, librarians, administrators, and technologists interested in inquiry, praxis, and social justice." https://digitalpedagogylab.com/about-digital-pedagogy-lab/
[7] The hyperlinks in this section are not actual hyperlinks. Just a stylistic choice that denotes that this text would be clickable in a blog post.

camping week, except I'll be posting some of these learning challenges on some additional locations, like bulletin boards and other communal places, taking advantage of the affordances of the location. There might even be some good ol' scavenger hunts and geocaching.

What should I bring with me to the camp?

I am glad you asked! Bring your own clothes, linens, and towels – as well as any toiletries you need. There is no cleaning crew at the camp, we're responsible for our own maintenance. We can all pitch in for cleaning supplies like laundry detergent. Beyond that, bring what you like! Your iPad, your smartphone, your polaroid camera, your acoustic guitar, banjo, flute, or other instruments, your pastels or watercolors, or your knitting or quilting needles, or anything else you might use to create or make. You can also come just as you are. We've arranged for food, so no need to worry about that - just let us know of any dietary restrictions. Pitching in for food costs is highly appreciated (see registration form)!

What if I can't make it in person?

The community has been wonderful thus far in creating spaces to engage in on Twitter (#rhizo24), on Facebook (see here), and on Instagram (see here) – this one is new for me. In addition to these, there will be spaces where you can beam into a number of locations (function rooms, campfire locations, and other common areas) through 24x7 open virtual rooms. This will allow you to interact both with people virtually and those physically in that location (of course, keep in mind time zone differences). If people go off the beaten path, WiFi is available throughout the campgrounds to enable the knowmads to bring virtual participants along for the trek. I don't know exactly how this will work, but we'll find out together! Either way, the course goes beyond the in-person week.

A LAST NOTE

I've mentioned this in past courses, so it might sound familiar if this isn't your first rodeo. One of the central narratives of rhizomatic learning is the idea that learning is at once a deeply personal, individual process and something that only happens in collaboration with others. We are all different, but we need each other.

By all means, push people's ideas… please do not push people.

Connect with everyone. Try and understand what they are saying and why they are saying it. And, on the other side, understand that when people push your ideas, they aren't pushing you. We do not need to agree with each other, to learn from each other.

Well, that's something, Aliki thought as she finished reading Dave's post. She wasn't sure that she was really sold on the whole blended rhizome part…it sounded more like a smoothie to her, but she was willing to try it. After all, she had never been camping and this was a free opportunity to try it out. The car ride to Toronto wasn't bad either. She was planning on attending the *Digital Pedagogy Lab* at the University of Windsor anyway, so extending her stay by a week to experience rhizo AND camping seemed like a no-brainer.

It was time for Aliki to RSVP for #rhizo24! She hoped that she would meet some of the people she'd interacted with over the years in person! Their interactions were life-changing for her.

March 8, 2024

It was Friday morning.

Aliki was sipping her first cup of coffee, in her campus office. It was still dark out. She was in the office hours before her "official" work shift. She wanted to get some rhizo-

time in before the day's work set in. She heard the chime of Outlook indicating a new email had arrived.   It was a confirmation that she had a spot saved for CampRhizo. *Huzzah!*

Aliki was a doctoral student, but she had also been working full-time at her university for the past eight years. As a staff member, she could apply for professional development funds that she could use toward this. Now, whether she was approved for these PD funds or not was a whole other question! The old adage "if you don't play you can't win" was as true for PD funds as playing the lottery - perhaps better odds with PD funds! Still, having a spot confirmed in CampRhizo, and in the *Digital Pedagogy Lab* meant that she was eligible to apply for these funds. At the very least it was gas and roadside diner money!

As she settled in and gazed out the window, a luxury for sure, she reflected on her Rhizo22 experiences. She couldn't remember if rhizo22 had a tagline, but it must have. The other iterations, including the upcoming one, had some sort of lens that Dave was looking at things through. She looked back at her blog posts and OneNote files from a few years ago to try to jog her memory.

According to her notes, rhizo22 took place sometime in June. It seems like the rhizocourses drifted a little more with each iteration of the course. In 2014 it was January, in 2015 April, in 2022 in June, and now in August. It's as if Dave wanted to offer a rhizo course for each of the seasons. Maybe the next one will be in October and we can all dress up for Halloween or something.

Look at this! she thought as she perused her notes. She came across a journal entry from early on in rhizo22. In it, she was collecting some thoughts on her motivations to join rhizo22. According to her (slightly younger) self, she had jotted down that she wanted to connect with people like her across institutional lines. It turns out that Aliki was really one of the few people, if not the only one, she knew of locally that was interested in these sorts of *fringe* educational experiences. No one was interested in rhizomatic learning locally, or even in things like open education. While the movement had picked up steam over the years, one is a lonely number. She was looking for professional connections that

could amplify her learning and her thinking. The internet was that place. Rhizo22 was that place. This is not meant to disparage her local colleagues. After all, you do get to chat, and vent, and organize about common issues – like parking – with many colleagues, but when it comes to learning new things, local people are rarely on the same page.

Aliki had tried her hand at MOOCs, the "x" variety. FutureLearn, and Coursera, and Edx were fun. She had even tried MiriadaX as a means to learning something new and while at the same time practicing her Spanish. However, the "x" never really lived up to its name. She recalls seeing a YouTube video of a panel discussion where the CEO of Edx described "x" as the experiment or the "unknown," but it turns out that many of these xMOOCs were operating in territories that were quite known… if you were familiar with "traditional" distance education. The content was fine, but her pedagogical limits were not expanded. She didn't even know if these platforms were called "MOOCs" any longer, or if the term had been long forgotten by practitioners.

Things were a bit more interesting in DS106 and CLMOOC. She doesn't recall how she got there. It was probably one of the "Dual Layer" MOOCs that she was in that introduced her to Education Twitter (or was it Facebook?) and from there someone in the courses mentioned something about one (or both?) of these educational experiences. From there, someone mentioned "rhizo" – whatever that was – and a short (?) trip down a rabbit hole, and there she was, participating with people around the world for nine weeks (the course was six) about *rhizomatic learning*. To say that this experience was life-changing might not be hyperbole. A lot of her friends from afar were as instrumental in her learning as her local professors and cohort mates.

"AHA!!!" She exclaims while doing a fist-pump. "Found you!"

Aliki had copied and pasted one of Dave's introductory blog posts for rhizo22 into Google Docs. Who said digital hoarding was all bad? In addition to some "setting the tone" points that were made in rhizo14, rhizo15, and the most recent rhizo24 (side thought: *can Dave really set the tone if he asks us to make it ours?*), this one included the six-week layout.

Rhizodemic Learning: Feeding the virus

Week 1: Fill in the Blank: Is _____ making us stupid?

Week 2: Cyborg Rhizomes: The machine takes over the rhizome

Week 3: Viral thoughts in ill-structured domains

Week 4: Interprofessional Rhizofictional Learning

Week 5: Rhizodemic Learning

Week 6: Rhizomes in a post-covid world

And it looks like the trend of participants "taking over" the course continued in rhizo22 as well! Some of the topics she had noted were:

Week 7: Fill in the blank: _____ will make you more creative.

Week 8: Rhizomatic Hearthstones in Candyland

Week 9: RhizoZen, and the mindful beating back of FOMO[8]

There might have been more, but this is when Aliki stopped keeping track. Her summer work that year had demanded more from her as July usually meant prep time for the fall semester. Universities had gotten onto the *post-pandemic pedagogy* bandwagon, and as part of that, there was considerably more effort to prepare both faculty and learners for the learning experiences that would officially commence in September.

As the sun was coming over the campus, Aliki was reading through her own collected notes and copied blog posts from rhizo22. She felt a sense of happiness as she was

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[8] FOMO, /ˈfōmō/ *noun.* anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media.

reliving those formative professional moments, but also a sadness. While she could relive those experiences in her mind, she knew that some of her cherished rhizocolleagues had passed over the last two years. They will be missed in rhizo24.

August 4, 2024

It was Sunday afternoon; *Digital Pedagogy Lab* had wrapped up earlier in the day and Aliki was taking the scenic road to Camp Rhizo. She'd be rhizomatically occupied for the next few days. She wondered who would be attending in person this year, who would be with us virtually, and who the new folks – if any – would be. She tried to keep an eye out at DPL for any familiar faces or familiar Twitter handles, and she might have spied a few potential rhizomes in the crowd, but I guess confirmations would be provided in due time.

Driving up to the gate of the camp there was no doubt that she'd arrived. There was a big banner near the entrance of an image that someone in rhizo14 had designed. The image said *rhizomagic* and the text underneath it said *welcome knowmads*. I guess all the work for that seminar presentation worked out because she felt like she was in the in-crowd. She knew what these words meant! It was still a day before the course started (officially), so she wasn't sure how many others would be on the campgrounds.

As she pulls into a parking spot, she sees a bearded guy come out of the attendant's office.

Looks like Dave she thought, and before she could say anything he spoke.

"Hey! I'm Dave. Welcome! You must be Aliki?"

After the customary exchange of pleasantries, Aliki was curious about how many people would be participating. Not that crowd size mattered, but she'd been keeping a mental tally of participation in each rhizo ever since she took a deep dive into rhizo-history for

her seminar research – one of her potential research threads. Dave indicated that there were about 40 people who had made the trek to Ontario for the in-person component, most of whom had already arrived. This was a mix of rhizo14, rhizo15, rhizo22, and new folks. There were also virtual registrants who'd most likely participate in the digital and hybrid spaces for this course. Those were about 250. So, in total, we have about 290 who've expressed an interest.

"That's definitely more than the 40 or 50 people I had hoped to bring together. It's rather cool if you ask me," said Dave.

"Anyway, you're working on your dissertation I take it?" asked Dave and Aliki nodded affirmatively.

Dave followed up with: "Any specific topic that you're thinking about?"

"Funny that you should ask!" said Aliki. "I've been reflecting on my rhizo22 experiences, and I've been doing a deep dive in the various nooks of the internet where rhizo14, rhizo15, and rhizo22 took place. I've been reading blogs, exploring discussions in the abandoned Facebook groups, seeing what the hashtags bring up on Twitter. I have a few possible threads that have come up over the past few months that I am grasping at. Social network analysis is one of them."

"Pretty cool! Are there any you are mostly leaning toward?" followed up Dave.

"Well, I've been reading the work of some rhizo14 alumni who researched and published together. It was pretty peculiar to see such collaboration given how siloed academia tends to be. I guess I am wondering what's the story behind that! I think you were one of the people who co-authored, right?"

"Right!" Dave replied, "but I think that others who were more active in some groups, and others who were more active in others, are here as well. You know what? Let's head over to one of the campfires. I think that Skyler, Marion, Rowan, and Shannon are all by the campfire, and I think that Lane and Finn are joining them virtually for a campfire jam.

This might be a good opportunity to ask them! Keep an eye out for AK, he should be arriving tomorrow morning. I think he was also part of the various groups."

Dave and Aliki walked up to a campfire gathering. It seemed like there was an impromptu jam session in progress. Participants, apparently, took Dave at face value and brought some musical instruments. There must have been around a dozen people in person, and another half a dozen on big screens. Dave wasn't kidding in his blog post, he found a way to have people beamed in. *Cool! I wonder how all of this was accomplished*, thought Aliki and made a mental note to ask Dave how all this was set up.

"Hi everyone!" said Dave as they approached the gathering. He pointed to Skyler, Rowan, Shannon, and Rowan and introduced Aliki to them, and then pointed at the screens where Lane and Finn were on-screen. Dave said "Aliki has been doing some rhizomatic learning archaeology and she came across some of your papers and presentations. I thought I'd introduce you to each other so she can ask any questions she has to the people that lived the experience.

Aliki thanked Dave and took a seat in the circle. She grabbed herself some hot cider and enjoyed the remainder of the jam session. When things quieted down a bit, she looked at the group and said "it's nice to meet you all in person. I feel like an honorary member of rhizo14 having read all the discussions on Facebook. I also read your research papers and saw a few of your presentations online. They really made me think of classroom learning in a bit of a different way. I have so many questions, but I guess I should start with: what came first? The rhizo14 or the rhizo-research? Or…maybe stated differently: Did you come to the course with a research agenda? Or, did it emerge organically?"

Marion started to answer: "I think there are some of us, probably many around this campfire, that came to the course first, and then working together emerged as a thing to do. I do recall that there were a small handful of individuals who actively tried to distance themselves from the *learning* and interactions with the course because it seems like they had come in with a research agenda. It seemed to me, at the time, that our community's attitude was *if you're here, and you're engaging with the class, then you're*

in the class, otherwise, whether you want to or not you are having an impact on the environment that you are researching, right?”

“Interesting,” Aliki replied. “I recall seeing a post by Dave from 2014 that said something along the lines that the Rhizomatic Learning courses were his research labs. I had wondered if such a framing impacted whether or not other researchers flocked to the course”.

Aliki could see the heads around the campfire, including those on the giant screens, nodding a resilient “no”. Granted, it was only a handful of people, but it seemed like the message was clear with this particular group of researcher-participants.

Lane’s voice boomed from the screen “No, it’s quite interesting that Dave had written that, I don’t even remember reading that at the time! For me participating in the course and in the research was more about my own professional environment and *figuring out* the rhizome and how it could be useful. I mean, ultimately it was not applicable in my contexts, but we had a lot of fun exploring it. It was messy…, but fun.”

Riley tagged on “yeah, me too. I remember being part of a few collaborations across different configurations of people, but none of that motivation came from any directives from Dave. I think that it would go against rhizomatic learning to need a leader to lead us, right?”

Others around the campfire nodded affirmatively and smiled in affirmation.

Shannon pondered out loud… “If you’re going to swarm, you’d need a hive, right?” Aliki wasn’t sure if Shannon was talking to her, to the group, or just pondering out loud.

“What do you mean?” asked Aliki.

“Well, one of the articles that came out from these groups talked about swarm writing” replied Shannon. “Where does the swarm live? How does it convene? The swarming is the middle of the activity, but what is the start? If insects aren’t an appropriate metaphor, how about a patch of land where plants can grow – that’s rhizomatic, isn’t it? Or a petri-dish where clusters of activity can occur. I am just wondering…let’s say we don’t need a

leader, like Dave, but do we need a space and a place to act as an incubator? I don't know
– just thinking out loud."

It seemed to Aliki that this one was a bit of a heavy question for the late hour. Something
perhaps to come back to – another thread! Despite the late hour, Aliki was even
energized, and other questions flooded her mind. How did they get to rhizo14 to begin
with? How did these collaborations start? Were they collaborations? What did the
dynamics look like? And were the comings and goings of the course impacting what
happened in these smaller pods of activity? The hour was getting late so she'd have to
save most of her questions for the coming week, wherever she could squeeze them in.

"On a bit of a separate subject, how did you all find your way to Rhizo14 to begin with?"
asked Aliki. She thought that if she's going to ask people about their collaboration
experiences she might as well start from the beginning!

Lane's voice came across the screen's speakers "well, I had experimented with various
MOOCs over in 2012 and 2013. Some MOOCs about *Education and Aboriginal
Cultures*, from the University of Toronto I think, then I came across another MOOC from
the University of Edinburgh called EDCMOOC, which seemed to have a different format
than the *Aboriginal Cultures* MOOC[9]. I'm not quite sure how I ended up in rhizo but
that's how it goes; you participate in EDC. And somehow through EDC, I stumbled upon
Google communities… those communities on *Google+*. There I lost track. I was down a
rabbit hole and came out the other end into rhizo. But that's how these things go."

Shannon jumped in: "I knew Dave from some MOOCs back in the early days. Dave was
doing something with Siemens and Downes that I was following, it was related to
connectivism, I think, and different personal learning networks. I was really captivated
by MOOCs. Then later on I saw that Downes was doing a MOOC on eLearning, I don't
remember the specifics, but I remember following along. I must have come across either
a blog from Dave or something on Twitter about Rhizomatic Learning that piqued my

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[9] As of this writing, this MOOC is still available if anyone is interested in taking part:
https://www.coursera.org/learn/aboriginal-education

interest. I was vaguely familiar with Deleuze and Guattari's work, so I was curious about it, and I joined.

Lane laughed and smiled: "Funny, I joined *despite* the philosophy. Philosophy feels like punishment to me."

Shannon responded "yes! Well, interesting enough D&G[10] were really left by the wayside early on after we appropriated the rhizome as a framework to discuss learning. I guess some people didn't like this because there were two camps that emerged out of this debate."

Riley jumped in: "I remember that. I think there were some people who felt that you needed D&G otherwise there is no point in talking about rhizomes, use something else, some other metaphor. I think this was an epistemological difference. You can learn from experience and learn from Reading. It's not one or the other, and there isn't one canonical "rhizome". Dave's approach was not D&G's, but D&G set him off on the path to explore his own version of the rhizome. Also, I had specifically sought out a connectivist MOOC so that I can have the freedom to explore learning my own way, so I did not want people to force me down a prescribed path."

"Interesting," Aliki exclaimed. "How did you arrive at rhizo14?

"Like Lane, I had explored some of the xMOOCs of the time, which really didn't stand out very much. I was also in EDC MOOC, but even though it was offered on an xMOOC platform it felt different. I found my way to MOOC MOOC…"

"MOOC MOOC?!" Aliki said in a rising tone. "What's that?"

Riley: "It was a seven-day meta-MOOC about MOOCs. The MOOC MOOC sought to understand the MOOC and its place within education. Anyway, I was in one of those offerings – I think it ran multiple times – and that's where I learned of Dave and his

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[10] Many individuals referred to Deleuze and Guattari as "D&G". D&G is both a reference to the philosophers, as well as a placeholder for their work on the rhizome.

concept of Rhizomatic learning. As MOOC MOOC was winding down, it seemed like rhizo14 was about to start, so I decided to give it a try."

At that point, Dave was approaching. He let participants know that he was turning in and kindly reminded the last people to put out the fire before they too went to bed. Aliki asked, "So, what time is the first session tomorrow?" Dave smiled and responded: "I am not the boss of y'all. People can start to engage whenever they are ready. Suggestions will be posted, sort of like a *daily create* type of thing. But, the caterers *are* our bosses – in a sense. Breakfast will be served between 7 and 8 for those who don't want to forage for themselves. See you all tomorrow! And don't forget, our first movie for Rhizo@theMovies is *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared.* Starts at 8 p.m. tomorrow evening."

As Dave headed away, Lane and Finn bid us adieu for the evening as their workday would be starting in a few hours. Slowly people started turning in. Aliki's questions would have to wait. Time to do some journaling and jot them down, though, otherwise she will forget.

August 5, 2024

<div align="center">

beep **beep** **beep**

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Aliki's morning alarm went off. It sounded like one of those submarine general alarms. It was annoying as hell, but she quickly turned it off anyway. She wasn't an early riser, but the excitement over the first day of rhizocamp meant that she woke herself up early.

After getting dressed and grabbing her phone and a notebook she headed to the cafeteria for breakfast. The place was mostly empty. Other rhizo participants either got up earlier than she did, or they were sleeping in. Either way, no one was the boss of them!

She spotted Shannon and Riley chatting and drinking coffee at one of the tables and she spotted an empty seat. She approached them and asked if she could join. They made a welcoming gesture. Aliki took a seat and nodded appreciatively.

"So, you were part of rhizo22!" said Shannon. "How was that?"

"It was…*interesting*…" Aliki replied. "It was the first course I took that was so…*free*. I was experiencing a lot of FOMO, but at the same time I was learning a lot about navigating learning in a connectivist way"

"Sounds a bit like my experience," said Riley. "I had heard of this thing called *connectivism* before rhizo14, but I had never had an opportunity to experience it until rhizo14. I think of it as a life-altering experience."

Aliki was curious about the academic papers that came out of the rhizo14 experience, so steered the topic of the conversation toward there. "I recognized your names from some of the academic papers that came out of the rhizo14 and rhizo15 eras and I had some questions as I was conducting my digital learning archeology. Can I bug you with some of them?"

Riley and Shannon nodded.

"Yesterday evening you mentioned that you weren't influenced by Dave's experimental ethos when it came to researching in rhizo14, so I take it that the course came first, and then the research. But did you all know each other before rhizo14?"

"*sort of, but no*…" responded Riley. "I don't think that everyone knew everyone else ahead of time. We didn't join rhizo14 specifically to conduct research on rhizo14 – at least it didn't seem so - but we all had similar MOOCing experiences. From last night's discussion it seems like a few people were familiar with DS106, others with EDCMOOC, and others in connectivist MOOCs. Now whether they actually remembered people by name that's a whole other question. I do remember some people by name from my EDCMOOC experiences, people who made it to rhizo14, and to some of the collaborations I was part of."

Shannon was nodding. "Yes, I don't really remember knowing anyone ahead of time, except maybe for Dave, but I really did get to know people much more through the various collaborations."

"So, if you didn't know each other ahead of time, how did it all kick-off?" asked Aliki"

Shannon replied: "well, I guess it's different for everyone. For me, it sort of began like any connectivist MOOC up until that time. I was writing mostly on my blog. I was reflecting and posting on my own learning – something common back then – and I was sharing it with the group through the course hashtag, and through P2PU. I didn't particularly care for what D&G were writing. I read some of it, but they were not the boss of me. I'm a poor scholar in that sense, I guess. I don't really care what they were trying to say, I was just interested in what they make me think about the topic. Anyway, I became aware that there were these other spaces opening up. I think there was something on Google – but that was kind of slow and clunky – and there was a focus of attention on Facebook. I was not a fan of Facebook. *I'm still not a fan of Facebook*. But it seemed like there was a space where good conversations were going on in that slice of the Rhizo community. I think Riley, and Skyler, and Sasha, and Marion were there. I think Dave and AK and others eventually joined too.

Riley jumped in, "yeah, the Facebook group was that central space. That watercooler that brought people together. There were other spaces of course, like the P2PU comments – not sure how active those were – a Google+ community which was pretty niche, and Twitter – through the use of the #rhizo14 hashtag. There are probably more, but those seemed to be the prevalent ones." I was mostly active on Facebook at the time."

"So you had a space, or multiple spaces, but how did you gauge interest in working together?" Aliki asked.

"I think the first thing that the community put together was the *undoc,*" said Riley.

"Ah! The undoc. That was so messy it confused me, but it also piqued my interest" exclaimed Aliki.

"It was messy, but it also felt alive, and in-process," said Shannon.

"It was our way of working on a collaborative autoethnography done by rhizo14 participants," said Riley. "At the time, I was working on my doctorate and I really wanted to do collaborative research, but as an approach, it was prohibitive for a dissertation, so I never pursued it, until rhizo14. So one day I was discussing this topic with Marion, Lee, and Avery – probably a few others too. It was a side conversation within the course. A day or so later I remember seeing a post in the rhizo14 Facebook group that linked to a Google Doc. It was a call from Marion letting people know that a topic seemed to be of common interest and it invited anyone who wanted to participate."

"Yeah, I remember seeing that post, and I joined in that one too, I think," said Shannon. "At the height of that gloriously messy doc, we had something like 40 participants from rhizo14 sharing their stories, if my memory is correct".

"There were a lot of people, but as we got close to refining it and trying to learn something from it and get it in publishable form, people peeled off, and so did their stories."

"So were you interested in collaborative research and collaborative autoethnography?" asked Aliki while looking at Shannon.

"Well, I was unfamiliar with the method, but it's not what drew me to the collaboration," said Shannon.

"What did?" asked Aliki

"Language… And Texts… And Rhetoric…and expressions of individuals within the collective. One of the things that's often said is that when you collaborate you don't know where one person left off and the next one picks up, it's seamless. Well, how does this happen in rhizomatic contexts? How does writing at this scale work? This is what brought me to these collaborations. I wanted to be able to define this process from the inside – taking on the complex view of things, not a lab-coat reductionist view of it that usually comes from seeing it from the outside."

"So there were more than one?" Aliki asked.

Riley jumped in "My guess would be that most co-authored papers were collaborations of this kind. What happened after the work on the *undoc* was that whenever there was a call for papers or a call for presentations, we'd post in the Facebook group something like: 'Hey, there's this call for papers that's due on this date, who wants to join this paper?' And whoever said they would join that paper would be the ones who worked on that paper. That's probably why there are different authors and different papers and conferences and it's not all the same people."

"Interesting. How did this work out? Did everyone who wanted to participate get to participate?" asked Aliki.

"It worked fine enough," Riley said. "There is obviously algorithmic bias in what Facebook pushes to the top of the group discussion listing, hence impacting what's visible, but I think the cross-network nature of many participants in rhizo meant that even when someone saw something on Facebook, they could re-broadcast it to Twitter or G+, or any of those other spaces they interacted in. So, even if the post was buried for someone on Facebook, there could be other means of getting that information. I think for those who collaborated the process was just fine. Other people might have problems with it though."

"Once you got started, how did that collaboration work" – Aliki asked

"I think it worked well. Once we had a space, namely Google Docs, we just did it" said Shannon. "I think I found channels to discuss, plan, and collaborate as each project was in progress. Some things were dealt with by email. Others were done by Twitter direct messages. A LOT of discussion seems to happen in the *comments* tool of Google Docs."

"I think Google Docs was a game-changer," said Riley. "In past collaborations where we relied on Microsoft Word, we had to email a document to all collaborators, then you had to wait for someone to do their thing and send it back to the group. In order to keep versioning under control, you might have to wait for the document to full circle before it came back to you for more work. This process, before collaborative real-time editing,

was almost like an intellectual hindrance. In retrospect, the "Word + Email" days were a bit awful for collaboration."

"By the way, if I am not mistaken, there was one group of rhizo collaborators that wrote about their experience in rhizo14," said Riley. "It's probably somewhere in my Mendeley library. I can invite you to our shared Mendeley group for Rhizo and you can have a look around!"

"That would be awesome!" said Aliki.

Aliki continued, pausing a bit to collect her thoughts and formulate a question. "Um…so…for you, was this collaboration something separate from the rhizoMOOC? Or did you see it as part of the MOOC work? Or…"

Shannon looked pensive. He started "Hmmm… can you ever really remove all of the influences out of a system? If we take a complex view of power and reality, anyone we interact with plays a part in shaping that which went into the collaboration, even if they weren't named authors. Take Dave for example. Dave wasn't one of the forty-odd folks who initially contributed, but the autoethnography(ies) that emerged were already shaped by discussions that Dave started and engaged in. The same, I would claim, also holds true for the other interactions with other rhizo14 participants. Of course, the groups who collaborate can leave Dave out of any formal documents they produce – that's fairly is easy to do, just don't invoke his name – but the formal document, that final deliverable, is really only a very small part of the Rhizo14 collaborative effort that went into creating that document. From my point of view, most of the real work has been done on blog posts, comments posted in those blog posts, tweets, Facebook discussions, and so on. Participants' voices are encoded in some of those texts and they inform what transpires. Think of pool. The pool cue only strikes one ball, but in the end, many more balls are displaced from their original starting points."

By that point, the cafeteria started swarming with activity. Other rhizo24 participants were up and about, and the place was getting loud. Aliki's window for Q&A seemed to be getting short, at least for now. She had one final question before they all got going on

their day's activities. "One final question comes to mind – at least for now – Would you say that the space makes a difference for such collaborations to emerge?"

Shannon said "Before rhizo14, and all of the collaborations, I wouldn't have known. For me, the *aha!!! moment* was when I discovered the idea that space is not a void or silence. On the contrary, space is chaos, in the best sense of that word, in that it's full of possibilities. Space is the open places where no forms, no boundaries, no things yet exist, but where *anything* can emerge, *anything is possible*. But as soon as we engage in the space, boundaries form and things begin to emerge, effectively closing down the infinite possibilities as the emergence of things and ideas begins to define segments of the once-open space in relationship to me – the participant. I think that without space, without rhizo14, we would not have had the opportunities for the different configurations of collaborators and the artefacts that these groups created."

"That's an interesting point," Riley said "I think it's also important to acknowledge that space is not indestructible. The Facebook groups fell apart after some time... showing, perhaps, the riskiness and fragility of openness."

Aliki sighed, "Yeah. The groups are very much ghost towns at the moment. I saw this while doing a deep dive of the discussions in the three rhizo groups of Facebook… but… a network, or sets of networks, must exist once formed beyond the original boundaries, otherwise how did we all end up here, in rhizo24?"

At that moment Dave shows up, dressed up in a dorky camp counselor uniform. Oddly enough it suited him. "I trust you all slept well last night, ready for the first day of rhizo24?"

The day was about to begin, but Aliki suspects that the first day of rhizo24 was sometime in January when Dave announced the MOOC…no scratch that, event? Camp? Well, the rhizo*whatever*. More questions about collaboration would have to wait.

August 7, 2024

It was about halfway through the first recorded in-person rhizocamp. Aliki had spent the day discussing various topics that emerged over the last day or so at the rhizocamp. She managed to catch Avery and Lee in some unhangouts just by pure chance. She met Frankie and Toni who had made the transatlantic trips to join the camp. She overheard some discussion amongst rhizoparticipants about making a quilt out of the event. She wasn't sure what that was about, but perhaps another thread to follow at some other point. Today's rhizo-explorations had her walking and chatting with people on trails. After dinner, she just wanted a soft sofa, maybe near a fireplace. It wasn't that it was cold, but it was chilly and the crackling helped her think. She scouted an open seat near Marion and AK. These two had worked on some of the collaborations and she still hadn't spoken to them. *I wonder if I can bug them for a while,* she thought. *Eh, might as well try!* she thought to herself after she weighed her options.

"Is this seat taken?" she asked.

"No, by all means, do sit!" said Marion. AK nodded and waved *hello*.

"Sorry to intrude, but you are Marion and AK, right?" she asked

"That's correct," AK said, "but I don't think we've met," he continued

"My name is Aliki, rhizo22 alumna, and first-time rhizocamper"

"I think many of us are first-time campers. I don't even like camping, but when I learned who was coming I thought I'd at least try it out" said AK.

They had a good conversation, comparing what brought them to rhizo in the first place. It turns out that both AK and Marion had similar backgrounds to her. Both worked at universities, and both were working on their doctoral degrees while they participated in the rhizo. She wondered how they could balance it all. Anyway, it turns out that they both worked in various configurations of research teams that stemmed out of rhizo, doing some research on rhizo14, and working on projects and in communities (or so-called affinity groups) after the official end of rhizo14 and rhizo15.

"So, you worked together during rhizos?" asked Aliki

"In some projects, we did, in other projects we didn't. There were different configurations of people working on different projects," said AK. "There were some fun projects that came out of that".

"So, how did you find out about these projects?" continued Aliki.

"For me, Rhizo14 was mainly about Facebook. I think that's because both Dave and Bonnie were quite active on Facebook. I also didn't really use Twitter at the time, even though I had an account, and then there was that Google thing that no one seemed to use. *G+* or something, it was called," responded Marion.

"I used Twitter," interjected AK, "but I may be the odd one out. I had started to use it for conferences as my *public* persona, whereas Facebook was more for family and close friends. I was really reluctant to join the rhizo14 group initially, but I am glad I did because I wouldn't have known about these grassroots research efforts. I ended up joining the original Facebook group because I saw familiar names from EDC MOOC and DS106."

"I think I came across the whole rhizo14 course from a Google search. I was interested in Deleuze & Guattari, and I was interested in rhizomes. So one day I was Googling away and I found Dave's blog posts and I didn't know anything about it. I also didn't know any of the people who were in the rhizo14 group, but I just thought: *hey, this looks really, really neat, why not try it out?* I started posting on my blog about this stuff, and people started coming to my blog and leaving comments, and we ended up having discussions both on blog posts, and on the Facebook group."

"So P2PU didn't play much of a major role for you?" asked AK.

"No. At best it was a supporting actor. A place to go each week and find the weekly provocation, sort of like doing a DS106 *daily create*," responded Marion. "Then," Marion continued, "when the course was *over* a few of us started filling additional weekly topics.

Quite a few people did in rhizo14, which I think gave us participants the title of *freely associating rhizocats*."

"So not swarms?" asked Aliki

"I think a variety of metaphors emerged from rhizo14. Swarms was made up by one group, I think, to describe what the process of working together and writing together was like. Rhizocats came from another person – maybe Meredith? – who saw us all doing our own thing but convening at times to do something together. At least that's my understanding of it," said Marion.

"Was working together the norm for you before rhizo14?" asked Aliki.

"Have you seen the meme about group projects?" asked AK.

"No"

AK googled something really quickly and handed his phone to Aliki.

"When I die, I want people I did group projects with to lower me into my grave, so they can let me down one last time," read Aliki out loud and chuckled.

"OK, maybe it's not that dramatic," said AK, "it's still a funny meme. Anyway, I didn't particularly seek out group work. Partly due to communication issues, partly due to leadership issues, and partly because many students felt they had to be *accountable* which took us out of the flow of group work and refocused group energies into policing the contributions of fellow team members. This was not the case in rhizo14. *We just did stuff*."

"So, all this research-doing, was it an extension of the course for you?" asked Aliki

"No, I saw it as more fun," said Marion. "I just thought it was a load of people I liked who were doing things together. We had such good fun doing Rhizo14, so why would we not want to continue? There was a facet of my life where I was a doctoral student, and another facet where I had my career in instructional design at the university, and then there was the rhizo-side of things where I had all this fun stuff that I did in every other minute; and I never thought of the rhizo stuff as research, even though it was. It was post-rhizo when we started reconfiguring into other groups that the output *felt* more like research. Some of the rhizo things were *messy*. We were having fun."

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[11] There are several versions of this meme. This version was sourced from: https://www.someecards.com/usercards/viewcard/when-i-die-i-want-the-people-i-did-group-projects-with-to-lower-me-into-my-grave-so-they-can-let-me-down-one-last-time-0e740/

"We certainly had much fun with it. We added the '*rhizo-*' prefix to a lot of things. We also borrowed the prefix *'un-'* from things like unconferences, for projects like the *undoc*…" added AK.

"Rhizo-nonsense at times, but it was good fun," continued Marion.

"Well, my story is pretty similar to AK's with group work before the rhizo14 collaborations. But…things have changed now a bit. I've actually reached the stage now where I hate working on my own. My dissertation is different, that's *my* dissertation. But for anything else, I always try to get a group of people together because it's just less work for each person to do. *And* it also ends up being a lot better." Marion paused and had a sip of hot apple cider.

"I am not sure if it's less work," interjected AK, "but it *feels* easier. Maybe the amount of work that we end up putting in is more when compared to solo work – I feel as though when I've worked in groups now we do a lot of internal peer review and QA – but despite the larger volume of work it feels easier to do it."

"Yeah, it feels easier," Marion continued. "I do think back to the stuff that I've worked on together with Lee and Finn and it has just got really, really, easy. And I get to the end of a paper now and I actually don't know which one of us wrote which words."

"So, this seems like a true collaboration rather than mere cooperation…" Aliki pondered out loud.

AK rolled his eyes and groaned, which perplexed Aliki.

"Don't mind him. He's still a little prickly about the "C" word. Collaboration, cooperation, *tomayto*, *tomahto*" said Marion laughing a bit.

"It's a long dissertation-related trials and tribulations story, maybe best saved for another time," said AK with a smile. "But yes! I would agree. If we're talking about Bruffeean designations, I'd call at least some of what occurred in rhizo14 as *collaboration*."

"Ah! Bricolage!" said Marion, perhaps thinking out loud – you could imagine a lightbulb floating overhead! "I think what we use in our collaboration is really bricolage. What we do is we go and throw something together, ideas, thoughts, citations that spark curiosity. We're not precious or protective about it - we just put it out there. The main thing is that it's there, and we get to iteratively explore it."

Two more threads to follow up on, thought Aliki. "I might have to take you up on that, AK," said Aliki, and continued "that's an interesting comment about not knowing who wrote what, Marion. How does the process of working together actually work? Did people feel protective of their words? Was there some sort of norming stage?"

"I think we felt our way around the process initially. We didn't really have a planned meeting to say '*OK folks, what are the expectations?*' We just *did* things. Google Docs was our sandbox and we proceeded by feeling things out. I think in later group reconfigurations I already knew how others worked, and others knew how I worked, so we could skip some of the *storming* stages. When I work with new people now, I think I am more aware of this process and I would tend to say '*hey look, here's how I work.*' In the groups that I was part of, we seemed to not be precious about the parts we contributed. People seemed to edit, suggest changes, and tweak collaboratively. The only exception seemed to be where there was ambiguity about what someone meant when they wrote what they wrote. Discussion would ensue there."

"So…in terms of these various group reconfigurations, did you want to participate in everything? Or were you judicious about what you joined?" asked Aliki.

"I honestly felt a bit of FOMO initially," said AK. "I wanted to do everything, even though realistically I didn't have time for everything. I'd jump in when a call was published on Facebook, but I wouldn't always be able to follow through. Some projects I don't think got off the ground either". Some calls I know I missed, I don't know if I didn't see them, of if Facebook *hid* them from me."

Marion: "Yeah, the algorithm can be a bit of a mystery at times. There are two ways this can be approached. One way of thinking is '*Oh my god, they didn't include me.*' The

other is '*Oh my god I wish I'd known.*' These two things are very different things. Because you're not feeling left out, you're not feeling excluded. You're just not feeling *included*. This is the difference. I think I was more in the *wish I had known* camp."

 "AK, you mentioned that some projects never got off the ground. Do you have any examples? Do you have any sense of why they didn't take off?" asked Aliki.

"I can't name any projects specifically right now. I'd have to look at my notes and my Google Docs folders. I do know that a few years ago, when I was collecting data for my dissertation, I came across a number of posts a few of us had made. They were calls for participants – in typical rhizo-fashion – but some of the projects didn't ring a bell. After doing some digging around, I discovered that the projects had gone dormant. Someone had suggested something, and people were interested, but maybe other factors intervened and the project never started. I guess there wasn't enough of a spark to start that engine. But even when the train engine is going and you have combustion going, you still need to inject some fuel every so often to get to your destination. Maybe leadership was an issue?"

"I think that every group needs a catalyst or catalysts," interjected Marion. "I think that in all collaborations I was in, where a final thing was made, I can recall that there were people who were catalysts. They are not overbearing, and maybe they only need to spend five minutes, but they get the wheels rolling again. It's these small – or big – actions that sort of moved things along. The catalyst might not even want to be in charge, but I think, actually, they quite often were. If the catalysts were not there the writing wouldn't happen.   So I think, and I think possibly the reason that some of those projects did not go anywhere was that the originator may not have wanted to take charge."

"I like that term – catalyst," said AK. "Sometimes leadership can be viewed as *bossiness*, or a trait that everyone might want to show off, but it can become problematic when it's done competitively. Catalyst on the other hand…that can be something to explore further. It also *feels* less competitive or threatening than *leadership*.

The hour was getting late, and Aliki felt like she was past her bedtime. She had one final question though – at least for now – *do questions really ever end?* They just spawn more questions. Anyway, she asked: "So, a rhizo14 collaboration ended when a deliverable is produced? Is that the natural adjourning point?"

"I am not sure what a *natural* adjourning point might be. There might not be just one. For example, we worked with Sasha and Meredith on one of the collaborative projects. At the end of that project, they let us know that this was it for their work in collaborative projects of a research nature. I think that they were interested more in the company than in the writing or researching of the project itself. They saw it through, and then they adjourned. It wasn't mean or rude, and we kept having fun with each other in other facets of the course. Even in the *undoc*, when we worked on the original autoethnography, didn't we have something like 40 people initially?" asked Marion.

"Something like that" nodded AK – looking tired.

"Many of those people peeled off. They didn't say anything; they just didn't continue. So, I guess that's another kind of adjourning," continued Marion. "Maybe we don't get traditional sorts of adjournment in cMOOCs, because maybe it is just different people who come into the fold, so adjournment might be on the individual level rather than the group level. You get different individuals at the center and at the edges and this is always in flux. I think people's motivations also change. For example, early on I wanted to do research, and doing research with all of those folks was really great. The topic mattered initially, but as I got to know people I would have researched anything because it was research with those specific people as groupmates."

"That's interesting," said Aliki. So the topic or final deliverable at this point doesn't matter if you get to work with people you know?

Marion replied: "Yeah, the people do matter. And, at the end of the day, it still is research, it is still good to get a publication out of it. I'd be lying if I said that the publication didn't matter at all. We're all in academia and those metrics matter. It's also a nice punctuation for the collaboration. The social elements are nice, but I think if what we had been doing

over the past ten years was talking, without ever publishing anything, I suspect all of us would have adjourned a long time ago.

"Speaking of adjourning," AK said, "I am feeling like a zombie. It's time to go catch some rhizosleep – see you both tomorrow."

"You mean today?" asked Marion

"There's always a *wiseguy* in rhizo," said AK smiling.

Marion and Aliki adjourned not too long after. So many threads to follow…

August 8, 2024

It was early in the morning and Aliki decided to go for a walk in the woods. After all, nothing like good, clean, air to get the brain going in the morning. As she was returning to camp she saw Lane on one of the outlier monitors near the camp. She waved at Lane.

"Hi Lane!" Aliki said. "How are things?"

"Pretty good! I'm enjoying the nature sounds! I don't know how Dave managed this, but I really do like being able to beam into a monitor close to the wilderness and just hear nature sounds. I even saw some bunnies hopping around when it was all quiet!"

"That is pretty cool," Aliki said, "sort of like real-time background noise!

"Yes, very true!"

"Since you're here," she said "do you mind if I ask you some questions about your experiences collaborating in rhizo14?

"Sure! I can't stay long though, I have a meeting in 20 minutes".

"No problem," said Aliki, "and thank you! So, how did you get involved in the collaborations that happened in Rhizo14?"

"Well, to be honest, I don't fully remember the details." Lane said. "I'm not quite sure how I ended up there, but that's how it goes; you participate in EDC MOOC… and somehow through EDC I stumbled upon Google communities, the ones on Google+. I don't think those exist anymore. Anyway, from Google+ then I am trying out things in DS106, and then I'm in Rhizo! That's probably because somebody over there mentioned Rhizo or had it their timeline and it started appearing in my time as well. It might have been tagged in a *daily create* assignment. And, it kind of caught my interest because I'm interested in education. So, I came to Rhizo14 because I work in education and I thought it would be something good to explore for my job. I didn't particularly follow Deleuze and Guattari, and to be honest, Philosophy feels like a punishment to me."

"Interesting," Aliki said and nodded. "I can't say I am much into French philosophy either. How did you find out about the collaborations that were happening?"

"Also something I don't remember the specifics. Maybe Dave? I saw it in the Facebook group. We had started to work on an article for an academic journal based on our experiences in Rhizo14. I don't remember the title. Unlearning or something? Everything had to start with *un-*. That to me is a bit on the philosophical end. Sometimes I feel like it's *unsense*" – Lane said and smiled.

"Unsense," repeated Aliki smiling. "I like that, I should use it sometime! In your work together with others in this paper, how did things work out? Were there things that worked out well and things that didn't work out as well?"

"Well, the technology worked well. I think that google docs did a lot of the heavy work facilitating between the many individuals who participated in this collaboration. And, I think that the autoethnography tripped me up a little. This was a new concept for me and it took me a while to wrap my head around it. Working together with others was easy, the philosophy and theory not as much."

"Did you participate in other collaborations? – other than the autoethnography I mean" asked Aliki.

"There were many other collaborations that were happening during rhizo14. Not all of them are academic in nature. There were some collaborative stories that came out during DiGiWriMo[12], I think, where people who were part of Rhizo contributed to. They were stories made up of text and multimedia, so skills we had – or got in DS106 – were used here as well. There was another story and song created by a number of participants about a fictional family from Bovine Texas, and so on. I think for me the autoethnography was just one small part of this whole course and the collaborations that happened."

"Sounds like fun! How did you like it?" asked Aliki

"Overall, I learned a lot – and it reinforced for me that I love to learn that way. In a playful way. I also saw firsthand that's how collaboration can put people into new places to learn, or provide a place for them to share the things they already do but never had a place to share with people so that they can all learn together. I still think it was *messy* but it was fun. The whole course was fun, but sometimes behind fun can be some serious aspect; just like a clown makes you laugh, but then again, a good clown makes you think as well!"

"Wow!" exclaimed Aliki! "I know you have to leave soon, but I have one more question. Did you have any major *aha!!!!* Moments?"

"I think the biggest *ahaaaa!* For me was that there is a major misconception many people keep making. They are confusing the terms "learning" and "education". Both are important, but they are very different from one another. Learning is like falling in love - it happens. Education is like getting married - it needs lots of managing and logistics. I am

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[12] Digital Writing Month (usually known as #DigiWriMo) is a month-long writing challenge and collaborative adventure. It takes place in November every year and participants work to redefine "writing" in the digital medium. Participants do not confine digital writing merely to words, but open up the possibilities of composition to transmedial embrace. See the Connected Learning Alliance for more information: https://clalliance.org/blog/digital-writing-as-mode-of-thinking

also not sure where this might fit in, but I found the relationships or connections amongst participants to be loose and flexible…"

Then an alarm beeps on Lane's side. "I guess I gotta go. I'll see you later on!"

"Have a good meeting," Aliki said as she said goodbye to Lane.

Aliki headed back to camp to have some breakfast with the team. She had some more things to think about.

August 10, 2024

The final day of Camp Rhizo was wrapping up and Aliki was really tired. The last day of Rhizo camp was very active, with many people combining active…active…active activities? *That sounds odd*. Well, let's say that their learning explorations were out in the campgrounds and on the trails. Even so, Aliki could not pass over one last opportunity to chat with people around the various campfires that were stoked by Rhizoranger Dave.

Many different people had already started to congregate around the fires and the connected monitors started to light up as remote participants, like Lee, Lane, Finn, and others had started to tune in. The discussion was quite noisy, but a pleasing *noisy*. It reminded her of something Shannon had told her the other day. In the end, for Shannon, the collaborations – both academic and course happenings – in rhizo14 were a true cacophony. There was just all this communication going on amongst different people, all at the same time, and in many different channels. You don't get all of it, but you get some of it – enough of it. This final evening of campfire discussion was a blend of physical and virtual representation of what happened virtually in rhizo14. You had people there in person chatting, moving from circle to circle freely, you had people on big screens joining various discussions, and somewhere along there you had a Twitter feed with the #rhizo24 hashtag.

Aliki joins a group of standing individuals to join a conversation – any conversation. Around the circle she saw Riley, Skyler, Shannon, Marion, Rowan, AK, and Frankie; and on the monitor within auditory range of this circle, you had Finn, Lee, Sasha, and Alex joining in from their own remote locations. Someone was discussing collaborating on some sort of research project, but she didn't catch who.

"Hey Aliki!" said Riley!

"Hey there! What's this I hear about collaboration?"

"We're tossing around an idea for an autoethnographic research project based on #rhizo24. We'll post something on Google Docs tomorrow, but we're pondering the basic premises now…"

"Pretty cool," said Aliki!

"What are some topics that are bubbling up?" asked Aliki.

Shannon jumped in and offered a few ideas: "This might be a half-baked pondering, but what piqued my interest… and this is sort of from my professional background, was the multiplicity of communication channels. I think that that's a key thing in some of the work we do here; that there needs to be a number of ways to engage each other, to engage the content. So for me... a professional question is: How did all these different channels enable us to do what we did? Because… well… think about it… we've been writing scholarly papers with each other. I just don't think we could have done what it did on one channel. There had to be a way to use this channel for this, that channel for that, and to use the affordances of each channel to get to all these different ideas. I mean…who knows… maybe it was also just the luck of the people who showed up…. Well, maybe just the correct people self-selected themselves into this group, and they happened to be comfortable engaging on lots of different channels and, you know, switching from channel to channel as the collaboration progressed through various stages. This is one of the Cacophony dynamics that I want to better understand."

"Oh…Hey, speaking of collaborations, all this week I've been picking your brains about your original work in rhizo14 and rhizo15. I was wondering if I can ask you all some questions since I have about a dozen of you around this campfire."

The campers nodded.

"What are some things that emerged for you over the last few days, as I was bugging you about your past experiences, as things that could help such collaborations either form or move along?" asked Aliki.

"I think the environment is one factor," said Riley. "If I compare my previous experiences in xMOOCs to rhizo14, I think that cMOOCs, particularly rhizo14 felt more intimate. I got to know a lot of the participants as people, rather than as a name in a discussion forum. I think that this probably allowed for some of those side conversations to happen, which eventually led to collaborations…

"Hear! Hear!" said Shannon. "I often felt closer to this group of people than people I passed every day in the hallways of my own department!"

Riley continued: "For example, I met with Avery and Rowan in a Google Hangout back in the day, leaving Dave out of the conversation – sorry Dave!..."

"no offense taken!" chimed Dave. "The community IS the curriculum!"

"…and that conversation," continued Riley "emerged into a google doc, which was shared with the community, so people signed up for it, and then once the dust was settled, we had our group of participants."

"Sounds alive," said Aliki, "this contracting to a smaller circle, expanding to a larger circle, then maybe contracting back to a smaller subset of the whole, but larger than the initial small circle…"

"Yeah," AK said, "like, one of my big *ahaaa!!!* moments was that the *undoc* that we created was organic, messy, and alive. I think this makes for an interesting descriptor of the participation in this group."

Lane responded: "I think it's supposed to be messy, if it's alive. If it's not messy then it's dead. It may be perfectly preserved and easier to analyze, but it's not alive. It's missing something."

"The quote *we murder to dissect*, by Wadsworth – I think, was something that came up as an analogy for freezing the *undoc* in time," said Marion. She continued "I think technology also helped. I only focused on two or three channels of communication so that I wasn't drinking from the firehose, but Google Docs was there at the right place, at the right time. I could not fathom doing such collaborative work using something like HackPad or Microsoft Word. In addition to the collaborative writing of documents, we could have shared folders with other materials, like articles, that we could share with each other. Technology just worked!"

Shannon jumped in and said "there is also that human element. There is an aspect of confidence on the part of participants. Rhizo participants were confident, but I think it was also confidence that enabled people to participate in the collaborations – or even start them! I think the variety of people rhizo was also conducive to good collaborations. We, of course, were interested in education, but we come from different backgrounds and fields. Even on campus some of my best *jam sessions* are interdepartmental."

Lane added: "Yes!   Rhizo learning is on the fringes, and I think the course topic and the learners need to be prepared for working in the fringes, not expecting to be exposed to developmental knowledge."

Shannon said: "Right…and there's something that needs to be said about the MOOC itself. There was no rote learning. It is totally open-ended. It enabled connections to anything that made sense to you. And that was exactly what was so wonderful and wonderous about some of the collaborations that we put together; it was that we were able to go and just any direction that… Well, just in any direction! I started to say *any direction that made sense*. However, a lot of the directions we went didn't make sense…"

"unsense!" said Lane nodding and smiling,

"…and… and you know some of those threads we dropped, and others we didn't. Maybe we should have dropped them, but in the end, they were still there. So it was very much like an *extended jam session*."

"Collaboration seemed to be an implicit part of the course, not a separate extension to the course," said Riley.

"Right!" exclaimed Shannon. "So, there was content in the course… but it came from us. And that's something I've actually tried to implement in my class, and it's really hard. It's difficult to design. Dave! How did you do it?"

"Don't ask me!" said Dave. "I just threw the party, you made it all happen! I had hoped that I could organize, or seed, or support an ecosystem where people formed affinity connections in such a way that when the course ends, and I could walk away and the conversations and the learning continued, and I think that happened! I have no idea what my part is in it, but it happened."

"So, in the end, it was a course about *nothing,*" said Shannon, like that classic Seinfeld pilot![13]

"So…has this rhizo collaborative experience changed how you approach working with others? And has it spilled over into other spaces" asked Aliki?

Marion: "Well, I've realized that I seek out collaborations now, and I prefer to work with others, and… I wasn't always this person. At the same time, it's made me more wary because not all parts of all collaborations were rosy."

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[13] Seinfeld was an American sitcom that ran from 1989 to 1998 on NBC. The show itself was often described as being a show about nothing, because the vast majority of its episodes were about the minutiae of daily life. In one of the episodes Jerry (the protagonist, and stand-up comedian) and his friend George meet with NBC executives to make a pitch for a "show about thing". This episode was very meta in nature, in essence poking fun at the themselves. As of this writing, readers can view an excerpt of the scene were Jerry and George plan the pitch here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQnaRtNMGMI , and the actual pitch can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofOSlsNz5I8

Lane: "For me, it made me more confident to share what I had made and invite others to make stuff as well, be it written word, drawings, photography, or audio creations."

Riley: "Resilience…building resilience I think was a positive change. We had a rejection or two for articles that we submitted for peer review in some of the groups, but we kept at it and eventually got published. I guess this experience binds and builds resilience. I think I also learned about how to work in small groups and large groups, and small groups within larger groups. There is planning that happens in smaller pods of activity, some private conversations with some group members that then move onto the larger group. There is this back and forth between smaller groups within the larger one. I think I also learned about how radical the things were that we were trying to do is; and how to navigate the *establishment* to get published."

AK: "yeah, those rejections were demoralizing, but a good opportunity for growth."

Marion: "Oh, before I forget, bricolage! I think that might be a good term to describe what Shannon was describing earlier. We put a lot of things down on virtual paper, there were many paths we could follow, but the ideas were not fully fleshed out. We also weren't protective about what we put down. The opening we left, and that spirit of leaving it open to hacking, meant that we opened spaces for people to contribute, and see where the collaborations lead us. A bit of a constant negotiation…"

AK: "So a *leave your ego at your door?*"

You could hear Skyler from another circle responding "Nope!!!" while smiling.

Marion: "Yeah, I think some groups used that term, but I think you should still have your ego – the thing that makes you… you, but still be open to new ideas and approaches. I think it's what Shannon said, being open to new ideas that come from fields other than your own. You still think of things through the lens of your experiences and your own disciplinary fields. If we were without ego, then we'd all be the exact same – and where's the fun in that?"

 Shannon: "It's that cacophony that gives it an interesting flair."

Marion: "Yes. A collaboration for example that has Sasha in it will be quite different than one that doesn't have Sasha in it."

Sasha smiled from the monitor and was writing something in chat. Aliki couldn't quite see it. Maybe an opportunity for more digital archaeology later on.

"So, last collaboration question for #rhizo24 – I promise. Would you change anything about your collaborations?"

Lane: "No, I had lots of fun with the collaborative stuff."

"I agree," said Riley. "I would not take anything back, even if some aspects of the collaboration weren't as rosy."

"I think I might not jump into all projects right away?" said Marion.

AK: "Controlling that sense of academic FOMO?"

"Perhaps," said Marion.

It seemed like it was time for the musical portion of the evening because someone brought out the instruments. *I guess this was the **actual** jam session of the program*, Aliki thought, the program that wasn't a program but was created on the spot…rhizomagically.

Aliki made some notes on threads to follow up on, but she thinks that she has a dissertation topic in mind!

To be continued…

Chapter 5: Why Did We Collaborate?

Introduction

My research started with one overarching Research Puzzle. The Research Puzzle was:

> *Why did we collaborate, and have since worked on research projects, as a result*
>
> *of our participation in the Rhizo MOOCs?*

This Research Puzzle was a good puzzle to ponder and to use narrative inquiry to investigate because the puzzle was broad and it invited collaboration with research participants to investigate it. Early in my research, when I was working on the initial stages of the proposal, many colleagues considered the answer to this Research Puzzle to be self-evident. To paraphrase my colleagues' intuitive answer:

> *Why did people collaborate? Well, they all seem to be academics, so they want the*
>
> *publication credit. It doesn't take Sherlock to discover this. Why pick this topic?*
>
> *Furthermore, simple co-authorship does not mean collaboration!*

Having been an eyewitness to some of these events, and an active participant in a few of these collaborations, I had the sense that the answer was multifaceted and worth investigating. As part of this process I created, what I termed, *mini* Research Puzzles. The purpose of these mini puzzles was manifold. They helped make narrative inquiry more accessible to audiences that might be more conservative when it comes to dissertation formats by bringing something akin to a *sub-question* found in other research methods. It helped with the creation of questions for semi-structured conversations, as well as to partially organize the analysis for this chapter. Those three mini-puzzles were:

- What brought us together to pursue our common interests? (MP1)

- How do we, as participants, view the process of working together? (MP2)

- What sorts of formative moments indicated major breakthroughs in our working together, or signaled a transformation of the existing working partnership? (MP3)

In organizing the findings for presentation in this chapter, it wasn't as easy to take each "bin" (Wolcott, 2001), represented by the mini puzzles, and make it a heading. A *bin* implies that the elements of that *bin* are discreet and not connected to other *bins* of information that you are attempting to present. However, this is not the case. Elements and actors in this virtual parade did interact and influence outcomes *across* bins. Since categories are permeable, I adopted a form of storytelling to revisit and present findings in this chapter. I've also used the concept of a metatheme. Metathemes go beyond the *bins* approach to categorization by drawing from the entire body of data, or from a particularly powerful finding (Ely, 2007). Metathemes may also have the *meta* quality of reflecting on the research process, connections to the research literature, as well as on other findings (Ely, 2007).

The Road to Rhizo

The presentation of these findings begins with the story *before* the story. Craig (2009a) reminds us that there is *always* a story *before* the story. This background serves as context for the stories of collaboration that ensued, but also provides a means for the reader to better understand the actors at play. Some storytellers had crossed paths before meeting in Rhizo14, and others had followed in paths that fellow participants had traversed without knowing that they had done so. Some participants were new to the MOOC phenomenon, while others had started following these open learning spaces with

early cMOOC offerings. This section examines how I and my four storytellers arrived at

Rhizo14.

Lane: Lane works for a higher education institution. Lane's first MOOC was "E-

Learning and Digital Cultures," or EDCMOOC as it is known. EDCMOOC was a five-

week MOOC offered on the Coursera platform by the University of Edinburgh in 2014.

Even though EDCMOOC was offered on Coursera, it was not firmly situated in the

xMOOC category in terms of its pedagogical design. The conveners of EDCMOOC

curated resources and invited learners to respond to those resources in the course forums

or on their personal blogs, with an intent to be less specific about guiding student

activities (Knox, Ross, Sinclair, Macleod, & Bayne, 2014). This design decision made

EDCMOOC somewhat connectivist in nature. Once Lane had completed EDCMOOC

the next open learning experience was DS106. DS106 is a digital storytelling course that

began in early 2010 at the University of Mary Washington. In DS106, learners

approached learning through a *salon model* and managed their own digital domain as

they learned to understand storytelling and worked on creating different types of digital

media (Lockridge, Levine, & Funes, 2014). DS106 became an open course in 2011

bringing their salon model to a global community. Even though DS106 is similar to other

connectivist courses of the time period, providing a design that was distributed, and

encouraging participants to publish and reflect on their work in blogs and social media,

those who participated in DS106 did not consider themselves to be taking part in a

MOOC (Lockridge et al., 2014).

For conveners of DS106, open communities like DS106 were places where

structured serendipity could take place on an ongoing basis (Lockridge et al., 2014). This

type of structured serendipity brought Lane from EDCMOOC to DS106, via the now-defunct Google+ (G+) social network, which eventually brought Lane to Rhizo14. Someone on G+ mentioned Rhizo, so it showed up on Lane's timeline. Lane was not interested in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, but rather in the topic of Rhizomatic Learning. It caught Lane's attention because of an existing interest in education. Lane grew up with the idea that you keep learning until your fingers naturally have grown to be the same length, in other words: learning never stops!

Shannon: Shannon also works in higher education. Shannon started exploring MOOCs rather early, and PLENK[14] was Shannon's first MOOC in 2010. PLENK was a 10-week cMOOC facilitated by Stephen Downes, George Siemens, Dave Cormier, and Rita Kop with a focus on Personal Learning Environments (PLE). For Shannon, it started with participation in one MOOC, and then joined another half-a-dozen MOOCs, such as cMOOCs like CCK11, Change11[15], and ETMOOC[16]. Participation in one cMOOC led to another. It was clear that Shannon had participated in other connectivist MOOCs prior to arriving at Rhizo14. These MOOCs were often offered by some combination of Downes, Siemens, and Cormier between 2011 and 2014, and the idea of Rhizomatic Learning had remained something that kept Shannon pondering ever since their first MOOCs. Rhizo14 came at the right time. Shannon was looking for engagement with this subject, and this type of engagement was not available locally at the academic institution where Shannon worked. Through past engagements in cMOOCs Shannon decided to join Rhizo14. In

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[14] PLENK stands for Personal Learning Environment, Networks, and Knowledge. The original course site is only accessible via the WayBack Machine http://web.archive.org/web/20101116141306/http://connect.downes.ca

[15] For information on CCK11 and Change11 see Downes (n.d.)

[16] For information on ETMOOC see http://etmooc.org/

our conversation, Shannon mentioned that: "Now that I think about it. I think – I was receptive to Rhizo because it did get me out of my institution." Shannon was "happy to be in another space, and was willing to let that space be anything and just see what came along. Fortunately, there were some really bright people in there." At the time of the course, Shannon did use social networks, like Facebook, but engaged mostly with the course via a blog format. Having participated in the original MOOCs, Shannon was more familiar with the aggregated style of communication employed by past MOOCs, like CCK11, where individual learner's blog posts and tweets were aggregated via a daily email newsletter[17]. These newsletters allowed participants to discover both other learners in the course as well as the contributions of, and thoughts of, fellow learners.

Riley: Riley was also a higher education professional. Riley was introduced to MOOCs via academic papers. Riley began thinking about MOOCs sometime after completing their PhD work. Riley started getting curious about MOOCs, and what they meant for Riley's professional environment. The first exploration of a MOOC was EDCMOOC. By exploring the MOOC, and by continuing to read journal articles on the subject of MOOCs, Riley expanded their professional network of colleagues and peers and was eventually introduced to Cormier and other writers in this field through their writing. Rhizo14 was an opportunity to get to know the people *as people,* and not just know them through their published writing. Similar to Shannon, Riley was interested in Rhizo14 because the local environment didn't provide for the ability to discuss these types of ideas with people who wanted to explore them. By joining Rhizo14, Riley became part of a global community. Rhizo14 was also an opportunity to experience a

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[17] An example of such email Newsletters can be seen in the archives of the CCK11 course: https://web.archive.org/web/20121003154856/http://cck11.mooc.ca/newsletter.htm

connectivist MOOC. Riley had read about them and wanted to experience one, and in

2014 most MOOC offerings were of the xMOOC variety. When thinking about this

community, Riley exclaims: "Where have these people been all my life?" Finally, Riley

was also active on Facebook but not very active on Twitter.

       Marion: Marion was also a higher education professional on the PhD track.

Marion already used Facebook and considers both of the Rhizo MOOCs to be mainly

about Facebook; this is where most of the activity occurred in Marion's view. Marion

was not a Twitter user when Rhizo14 started. Unlike other participants in the course,

Marion discovered Rhizo14 by searching for rhizomes and came across Cormier's work.

Having read Cormier's blog posts and published work on rhizomatic learning, Marion

was also blogging about this subject. During Marion's rhizomatic explorations through

blogging, someone who was signed up for Rhizo14, and a participant in past cMOOCs,

commented on their blog and pointed Marion to Rhizo14 which was starting soon.

Serendipity! Before joining Rhizo14 Marion had some experience with open online

courses. Marion was a participant in some other MOOCs before Rhizo14, including one

of the instances of DS106. In DS106, Marion became interested in the multimedia

creation aspects of that course. This is similar to Lane's MOOC experience as well.

When looking back and thinking about joining MOOCs, Marion recalls "I love being part

of such an exuberant community, never knowing what we'll be talking about next but

knowing it will engage me."

AK: Finally, a little about me. I had been addicted to MOOCs since January 2011 when I was first introduced to LAK11[18]. Interestingly enough, other participants in the Rhizo MOOCs also self-describe themselves as *MOOC addicts*. After completing my last Master's degree in December 2010, I wanted to continue to learn, but I didn't want to deal with the administrative steps needed to take a course, or deal with any associated costs that come with formal coursework. I was interested in the learning, not the accreditation that comes with a grade on a university transcript. MOOCs arrived just at the right time for me. Over the years, I participated in a variety of cMOOCs, including LAK11, CCK11, Change11, DS106, as well as xMOOCs offered through platforms like Edx, Coursera, FutureLearn, and MiriadaX. Initially, I joined MOOCs to continue my learning. I did so without considering how the learning might apply to my work. This, for me, was a type of *learning-as-pastime*. As time progressed, I was interested in MOOCs from an instructional design perspective, paying close attention to elements such as pacing, participation, scaffolding, community formation, and technologies used. I was familiar with Cormier's work because I had read some of his work in CCK11 and Change11. The way I discovered Rhizo14 was through Twitter. While I had a Facebook account, it was, and still is, private. I usually prefer to use Facebook for close friends and family, while Twitter is usually what I use for professional networking purposes. On Twitter, I had been following Cormier, Siemens, Downes, and Kop, as well as fellow participants from past MOOCs I participated in. When I saw that Cormier was offering a Rhizomatic Learning course on P2PU it was an opportunity to learn more about the topic

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[18] LAK11 was the Learning and Knowledge Analytics MOOC offered in 2011 by BC Campus and George Siemens. As of 1/2/2021 the course is still available here: https://scope.bccampus.ca/course/view.php?id=365. Some information can also be found in Downes (n.d.).

and experience the P2PU platform. It was also an opportunity to keep learning because at

that time I was waiting to hear from the admissions department with results from my

doctoral admissions application.

Taking a closer look at the demographics of the storytellers in my narrative

inquiry, it appears that they have the expected characteristics described in MOOC

participant research. They all fit the expected categories for age and educational

attainment levels as described in the research literature, namely individuals who have

earned at least a college degree, with many having earned postgraduate degrees, and who

are between the ages of 20 and 50 years old (e.g., Christensen et al, 2013, Ho et. al, 2014,

Despujol et al., 2014, Ding et al., 2014; Lin & Cantoni, n.d.; Liyanagunawardena et al.,

2015). They are also all employed, a characteristic common amongst MOOC participants

in research examining characteristics of MOOC learners from that period (e.g.,

Christensen et al, 2013; Davis et al, 2014; Dillahunt, Wang & Teasley, 2014; Macleod,

Haywood, Woodgate & Alkhatnai, 2014). In terms of motivation(s) to join a MOOC, our

storytellers are also within expected parameters. While motivations can vary (e.g., Abeer

& Miri, 2014; Bonk & Lee, 2017; Milligan & Littlejohn, 2017), the two broad categories

are similar to those two categories discussed by Ericsson, Adawi, and Stohr (2017):

utilitarian and enjoyment. Zheng, Rosson, Shih, and Carroll, (2015) define the enjoyment

category as *edutainment*. Finally, I would categorize these storytellers as *memorably

active participants* (de Waard et al., 2011). These participants participated in the majority

of the MOOC in some way, for example, through blogging, tweeting, engaging on P2PU,

or the Facebook group.

Act I: Coming Together in Collaboration

Coming together in collaboration involves two elements: the motives and the

approaches that pair together to kickstart collaborative ventures. While there is overlap,

different storytellers came to collaborate in different ways and for different reasons. This

is not unlike the aforementioned research literature on learner motivation to join MOOCs

in general.

Lane does not remember exactly how they began working in the collaboration.

For Lane, working in the collaboration was similar to how Lane started in Rhizo14: there

were many invisible connecting threads and roads. Lane recalls that "someone suggested

that we write an article about Rhizo14" but how it started is lost to time for Lane. For

Lane "that's typically how these things go. Somehow, something is triggered. I was

triggered though by Dave Cormier." The invisible network of paths brought us together,

and that's "the way these things work" in connectivist MOOCs. For Lane, it seems that

the common interest was exploring the topic of Rhizomatic Learning, and the

collaboration was one specific instance of that exploration. The specific collaboration,

that Lane was a part of, had an immediate connection to Rhizo14, so it could have been

considered to be a part of the *regular* coursework activity, even though there was no

prescribed curriculum. Even so, it is important to mention that for Lane "the collaborative

article was just a tiny part of the Rhizo14 experience."

For Shannon, the interest in joining Rhizo14, and the collaborations that ensued,

were to explore aspects of professional practice that they could not explore within the

confines of their campus. There just weren't that many people interested in this topic.

Shannon said that in Rhizo14, they "could find within the group of people in the course, a

group that was interested in talking about some of the same things that I was interested in talking about." This motivation to collaborate harkens back to Personal Learning Networks (PLN) which Shannon had explored through a past cMOOC. "A PLN is a self-selected network of professionals from various occupational fields whose members hold common interests with the intent of sharing ideas and resources, collaborating, and providing support with the purpose of enhancing personal and professional learning" (Davis, 2013, p. 1). Trust, Carpenter, and Krutka, (2016, 2017, 2018) found that "the diverse, flexible, and multifaceted nature of PLNs supported professional growth across four domains: cognitive, social, affective, and identity" (2018, p. 140). This type of motivation also calls back to an older form of professional development, the Professional Learning Community (PLC), and the online equivalent, the Networked Learning Community (NLC). An NLC is a type of learning community across schools. This type of networked learning takes place when individuals from different schools in a network come together in groups to engage in a purposeful and sustained developmental activity; in doing so, they learn with one another, from one another, and on behalf of others (Jackson & Temperley, 2007). This type of networked learning should not be confused with the strand of Networked Learning described by Networked Learning researchers (e.g., Goodyear, de Laat, & Lally, 2006; Goodyear, Banks, Hodgson, and McConnell, 2006; Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005).

For Shannon, collaborations emerged from comments left on the Facebook group, and the collaboration became something fun and playful. One collaboration started as a side-chat via private message with another participant. The idea was to explore the MOOC itself from the lens of participants in the MOOC. This is a concept that isn't

foreign for cMOOCs, and there are past examples where MOOC participants researched

the courses that they were part of (e.g., Fini, 2009, de Waard et al., 2011; Koutropoulos et

al., 2012; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). A private message isn't necessarily a good

brainstorming space, so Shannon and the other Rhizo14 participant started a Google Doc

to collaboratively brainstorm. This was the equivalent of being in the same room while

undertaking a freewriting activity. Shannon recalls that the initial plan was to explore.

Shannon described the process as: "You won't edit me. I won't edit you. And, we'll just

start writing and we'll see where this goes. And so, it became very playful and kind of

fun." Afterward, once they got their bearings, the document was opened up to anyone

else interested in participating in the Rhizo14 community. Shannon recalls another *call

for collaboration* on Facebook. Other people had started similar clusters of inquiry, so

they posted calls that invited others to their inquiry sandboxes. These types of

opportunities allowed for a serendipity into inquiry. Shannon could explore topics of

personal interest, like collaborative writing, but was also open to exploring topics that

seemed interesting. It's worthwhile noting that even though the calls were posted on

social media, social media has often been described as *drinking from the firehose*[19], so

it's not possible to attend to every single message posted. Because of this, some calls for

collaboration might have been missed by MOOC participants. For Shannon, the writing

credit was a secondary concern when it came to collaboration. Shannon said: "I'm a poor

scholar in that sense. I don't document things very well" indicating that going through the

exercise is about an interest "in what they make me think about."

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[19] "Drinking from the firehose" is an idiomatic expression often mentioned with regard to social media and the abundance of information on the internet. It means to be overwhelmed, in this instance overwhelmed with information.

Riley's initial path into collaborations in Rhizo14 was similar to Shannon's. There was an idea for a topic to explore, and Riley posted on the course Facebook page to gauge the interest in doing some research on it. Riley had recently completed a course of studies and was interested in expanding upon what they had learned through formal education. One of the topics that had piqued Riley's interest was participatory research, and Rhizo14 seemed like a good place to explore this topic. Rhizo14 seemed like a unique learning experience that should be captured in writing somewhere. Others had done participatory research in the past, so that was an initial topic to explore. Riley had also seen other participants in Rhizo14, participants that they recognized from past MOOCs that Riley was in, which made them comfortable to jump into the conversation. At the end of the course, collaborations served another purpose as well. Riley had made friendships throughout the course and they didn't want to stop interacting with these individuals once the course was officially over. Future collaborations were a means to keep in touch and to continue to work on projects of interest.

For Marion, the course was all about Facebook, so Marion had noticed calls for collaboration posted by other members. Marion was also another person who had initiated those smaller conversations that eventually evolved into including more collaborative partners. Marion wore three distinct hats: higher education employee, doctoral candidate, and then there was all this "fun stuff happening in MOOCs" that Marion was involved with. Marion recalls that "I had all this fun stuff that I did in every other minute and I never thought of it as research." One of the projects that Marion worked on was described as *a mess*, "that was just us playing, wasn't it? Throwing things at it." Lane also recalls the same project being *a mess*, but both agree that it was *a playful*

mess. This type of creative playfulness was not unique to the Rhizo collaborations. They

are also reported in other contemporary cMOOCs (e.g., Honeychurch & Patrick, 2018).

From what the storytellers reported, *research* had been viewed as something really

serious by some participants, so there was an expectation of prohibition of fun while

conducting research. One of Lane's comments fits well here to counterbalance this

perception. Lane mentioned clowns as an example: "*a good clown can make you laugh,*

but they also make you think." A research project that is messy and playful can be that,

but it can also engage the researcher and the reader in a lot of different topics; life is

messy, and researching life is messy as well. Marion's initial motivation to be part of

collaborative research groups was all about the research. Marion's motivation for joining

subsequent collaborations, on the other hand, became more about the company that came

with those collaborations. Marion could work on projects that might not be personally of

interest if the people involved in the collaboration were interesting.

        A preference for working in teams *may not* be the norm for learners. For instance,

Favor and Kulp (2015) report in their study that regardless of the modality of the course,

learners preferred to work individually and didn't believe that groupwork positively

impacted their learning. This finding is also supported by past research such as that of

Finegold and Cooke (2006) who report that students do face challenges in technology-

mediated environments that influence their preferences for working with others, and

learners didn't go the extra step to collaborate when they weren't required to; as well as

Gottschall and Garcia-Bayonas (2008) who report that obstacles to group work include

the *free-rider* problem as well as difficulties in coordinating schedules. While some of us

dreaded group work in school before our Rhizo MOOC experiences, and while some of

the research literature points to this direction, it doesn't mean that group work is

universally dreaded by learners. It depends on the context of collaboration! For instance,

studies show that students appreciate the benefits of working in teams toward advancing

individual and collective knowledge (e.g., Ku, Tseng, & Akarasriworn, 2013; Macdonald,

2003; Volkov & Volkov, 2015), and that students do enjoy collaborating, sharing, and

riffing off each other's ideas, but it's usually the collective assessment poses an issue

(Macdonald, 2003). Assessment was not something that entered the equation in the Rhizo

MOOCs and the collaborations the stemmed from it.

Like Shannon, Marion might have missed out on some collaborations because

they were obscured by Facebook's content display algorithm. For Marion, the academic

credit was somewhat important "it still is research, it still was good to get a publication.

Let's be honest, we're academics."

My entry into the collaborations of Rhizo14 was through a Facebook post. Like

Lane, I don't remember which one, but as Lane put it: "that's the way these things work."

At the time, I remembered my collaboration in the MobiMOOC group quite fondly and

this seemed like an opportunity to do something similar in a different space. It was

encouraging to see familiar names attached to these calls for participation, either as

originators of the call, or as people interested in participating. In MobiMOOC, everyone

I collaborated with was a stranger, in that, I had not known them before joining the

MOOC, whereas, in Rhizo14 I did recognize some names from past MOOCs, both

cMOOCs and xMOOCs. This familiarity made the barrier to entry in collaborations less

daunting. The membership list in these collaborations was not the same for each

collaboration; in other words, each project had unique, yet intersecting, membership with

other projects. As described in other Rhizo14 research, the groups were dynamic and changed slightly per project, paper, or conference presentation (Bali et al., 2016). I, too, missed out on participating in some interesting collaborations because it was hard to keep track of all social activity in the courses, as Shannon mentioned. Similar to Marion, my feeling about missing these opportunities was "darn, I wish I had known" rather than "oh those guys! They excluded me!" My observation, both from being a participant in these collaborations and discussing them with my storytellers, is that the technology we had available to us extended and enhanced what we did but it rarely created the collaboration; the people involved created those. This is a sentiment also shared by Evans (2012). It would appear that coming together to collaborate was an act of creating what Teasley and Roschelle (1993) call a Joint Problem Space (JPS). While not all individual goals were the same at the beginning, there was enough common overlap of inquiry spaces to encourage the creation of that JPS that brought people to a collaborative research milieu. While the academic publication was a welcomed hidden benefit of the entire endeavor, it was not the sole, or even the primary, purpose for coming together with others to collaborate.

Act II: Of Humans and Non-Humans - Working Collaboratively

Role of Technology. Unsurprisingly, technology was a mediator in much of the work that occurred in the various collaboratives that emerged out of the Rhizo MOOCs. The shared space, which is technologically mediated, does play a role in people's collaborations (Janssen, Erkens, Kirschner, & Kanselaar, 2009). First, technology had a role in promoting certain collaborations. The Facebook algorithm promotes (makes more visible) posts in the group's timeline. The posts that are promoted by the algorithm have

more responses or reactions to them. This did impact who joined what collaborative

activities in that certain posts were not promoted the same across to all members in the

Facebook group. This didn't particularly bother my storytellers. While some would have

liked to have known about the opportunities that they missed, it's not something that they

dwelled on.

Once a group had convened, that joint workspace was Google Docs. Lane recalls

that "using Google Docs worked very well for the collaboration process," with Riley

adding that before Google Docs the technologies used – namely Microsoft Word –

became an intellectual hindrance. Each participant had to wait until the next person in

line sent them their version of the document, and that person sent it to the next person

until a circle was complete. This is an example of a technology forcing a *sequential*

collaboration (Salmons, 2009). With offline tools, like Microsoft Word, waiting to take

turns was "pretty awful," and it provided "an impediment to collaboration," especially

when there were multiple authors involved. Having the ability to see what others are

writing in real-time, and to engage in conversation with your collaborators was a

revelatory experience, and it broke participants free from the constraints of sequential

collaboration.

Marion mentioned that "technology worked as soon as we just realized we were

just going to use Google." Technology works once you commit to something and work

with whatever boundaries, affordances, and limitations are provided within that tool.

Having our collaborative space be a Google Doc provided a few affordances. First, one

could engage in side conversations in the margins by using the commenting feature. This

provided a space for ideas to develop in the margins until they were ready to join the

main document. Second, the main body of the text permitted everyone to join in the same space and ask questions. Some documents included multimedia elements and resembled what Ely (2007) calls a *pastiche*. With elements that were sometimes hard to understand, having this joint space made it easier to communicate. Third, Google Docs had recently introduced the *suggest* feature in the summer of 2014 which allowed co-authors to suggest edits to sections written by others. This enabled another level of politeness norming in the writing process. Finally, having a central space freed us from having to worry about document version control, or stated differently avoiding having to ask the question "who's got the most recent version?" because the most recent version was always online. As a collaborative group, authors didn't have to deal with other members labeling a document as "final" and then having the oft-mocked "final final final final" version at a future point in time. This type of collaborative writing, enabled by Google Docs, removes the sequential order that enforces a hierarchy and a unified authorial voice (Hogue et al., 2018).

From the conversations with my storytellers, the previous ways of working with documents, one author at a time in a sequential manner, is a legacy of p-Learning (Dron, 2016), while the Google Docs approach to collaborative writing was developed in parallel to the Rhizomatic Learning course interactions and overall course ethos. This flexibility of Google Docs enabled collaboration despite conflicting schedules and having participants in different time zones, an advantage also commented on by King (2016).

Participation Norms Setting. Beyond the technological aspects of working together, there were processes that emerged for how the storytellers worked together in their groups. In no instance was there ever a formal "hey, this is how I work" type of

conversation to begin the storming and norming phase of working together. Group norms emerged from actually doing, from collaboratively working on shared documents. This process was messy, but it also meant that it was alive and evolving. Teamwork is a dynamic process that unfolds over time (Bell, Brown, Colaneri, & Outfield, 2018), and it's a journey (Gardner, 2005). Clusters of activity and norm-setting occurred both in the documents, via tools like the comment tool, and via private messages between group members. If smaller clusters had not caucused separately, away from the main document(s), to determine the variables, and try to address any concerns, the collaboration ran the risk of not being productive. As Gardner (2005) indicates, collaboration is not required for all decisions.

According to Elliot (2006), collaboration is made up of two primary components, and they both must be present for successful collaborations: social negotiation and creative output. Elliot (2006) indicates that small group collaborations rely on social negotiation to evolve and guide the process and creative outputs. These side-caucuses served an important function in collaboration as a means of social negotiation which ultimately impacted creative output, which, in this case, was a final research paper or presentation. Side-communications were not merely limited to those in the collaboration but included actors outside the boundaries of the defined group. When expertise was needed that was not found in the group, or a second opinion or *"reality check"* was necessary, the group expanded to seek out that expertise and engage with them.

In addition to these side-conversations, there were a variety of politeness options and norms that emerged on different Google Docs. In the older version of Google Docs, the two main options were that one could post comments, or one could edit over someone

else's text. To be polite, you could use a different color to show what changes you made, or use the strikethrough formatting option (e.g., ~~strikethrough~~) to show that you deleted something, but you didn't have to use these. Using different colors and strikethrough text also made editing a challenge. Starting in June 2014, there was a 'suggest' option available in Google Docs that functioned much like track changes in Word. However, at the time, the suggest option did not work well on mobile devices; you could neither see nor could you make any suggested changes. This made it only half-useful, according to some participants. The *suggest* function was useful for several storytellers and it seemed to enhance collaborative procedure options.   Norms also emerged over the use of the *suggest* function.   Some of the approaches used harken back to Teasley and Roschelle's (2013) *narrations*, a verbal strategy that enables members of a collaborative to monitor each other's actions and interpretations.

In some groups, small acts, like suggesting different punctuation, were not tracked as they became a nuisance to edit and accept, and they also cluttered the workspace in the margins where other ideas were developing. Only bigger elements, such as adding paragraphs, expanding on sentences, or truncating longer paragraphs, were used for suggestions. Even with a suggestion function, it appears that several storytellers expected organic growth in the collaborations. Marion, for example, says: "I will throw some rough words onto Google Docs to get a sense of what we might want to say, and throw those open to my collaborators to change. I'm not protective about these words as I don't really consider them to be mine or set in stone – so when I find that somebody has changed them it doesn't bother me." This connected with elements of trust between collaborators. Trust and respect enable the feedback loops necessary for this type of

collaboration (Hogue et al., 2018). Unsurprisingly, trust along with getting acquainted

and communication have also been identified as an important component in

collaborations (Brown, Eastham, & Ku, 2006; Coleman, 2013; Hasler-Waters & Napier,

2002; Kaplan, 2002; McMillan, 1996; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Salmons, 2019; Shea, 2007;

Thompson & Ku, 2006; Tseng, Ku, Wang & Sun, 2009; Williams, Duray, & Reddy, 2006;

Zhang, Meng, de Pablos, & Sun, 2019). Getting acquainted is more than just knowing

people's names; it's getting to know people's predispositions, their thoughts and beliefs

and ways of being (Hasler-Waters & Napier, 2002), and this aspect of collaboration, the

getting to know each other and building that trust, was partly achieved through

participation in the Rhizo course because participants engaged in the collaborative joint

exploration space, but also in the main course exploration space.

The research literature on collaboration indicates that there is, at times, a

hesitation to share knowledge in a group setting out of fear that you might be misleading

your fellow groupmates, or out of a fear of criticism (Ardichvili et al., 2003). This is the

case because there is normally an aversion to making ourselves vulnerable within the

hierarchical structures that exist in day-to-day life (Bali et al., 2016). However, the stories

shared by my storytellers run counter to this aversion to sharing. Collaborators like

Shannon were open to exploring where these collaborative activities lead, and

collaborators like Marion were not possessive of their contributions and provided

openings for others to contribute and grow. Rhizo14, as a course, was also

nonhierarchical and this ethos transferred over to the collaborations that took place. The

open nature of collaboration in these groups is reminiscent of a type of gift economy

(Raymond, 2001; Rheingold, 1993) which served as a means of increasing group

cohesion (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Group Cohesion is defined as "the sum of all the forces that are exerted on members to remain in the group" (Festinger, 1950, as cited by Toseland, Jones, & Gellis, 2004, p. 17).

Finally, in the subsequent course, Rhizo15, and even in collaborations that continued long after the end of the Rhizo MOOCs, the storming and norming phases were truncated because people already knew one another to some extent. This posed other issues, like developing approaches to welcome newcomers into an existing community and not make it feel like a clique, but this line of inquiry was beyond the scope of this narrative inquiry. An important aspect to note in the rhizomatic groups' storming and norming processes is that a "rhizomatic learning space has a tension between rhizomatic multiplicity, on one hand, and shared literacies, on the other. This tension is problematic for all and discouraging for many" (Bali et al., 2016, p. 55).

No Pressure Participation. Another aspect of collaboration in these stories was the lack of pressure to participate at a certain minimum level. Those who worked together with others felt comfortable participating in these collaboratives to the extent that they felt comfortable or were able to, given competing interests. This connects to the previous section in that there was an element of trust and respect amongst participants in what they contributed. The pressure to produce a certain percentage of work often derives from the so-called *freeloader problem* whereby an individual benefits from the work of others without contributing to the team. In the case of these collaborations, an individual who contributed to the work produced was acknowledged, regardless of what their percentage of contributed work was. In fact, it was often hard to parse out who had contributed what when the final document was complete. In one of the early collaborative efforts that

emerged in Rhizo14, there were about 30 individuals who had contributed an

autoethnographic account of their Rhizo14 learning. When the time came to move onto

the next phase of the project, something that would be presentable to an external

audience, a great number of participants withdrew from the effort. It is beyond the scope

of this research to discover why they withdrew, but it would suffice to say that there was

no pressure to continue to collaborate if they were not able to.

The lack of pressure to perform to specific standards and measurements also

meant that participants could embrace their egos and bring to the collaboration what was

unique to them. Early on, in some collaborations that I was a part of, the phrase *"leave*

your ego at the door" caught our attention with regard to our collaborations. At the time,

this was discussed amongst our members in light of our working together. It was also

something that was mentioned in the discussion with storytellers. The phrase at the time

generated a lot of discussion because of its conflicting interpretations. What some,

including me, understood as "don't be bossy" was interpreted by others as "you must

conform." Hence, embracing your ego came to mean embracing individual knowledge,

personas, and lived experiences. Shannon mentioned that this diversity of backgrounds

and knowledge made the whole greater than the sum of individual parts. For Lane, part of

what made Lane's contributions memorable were the approaches that they had learned

and adapted from participating in open courses such as DS106. Others brought

enthusiasm about a specific topic, while others brought skills in the literature review

process and access to academic databases that some other participants may not have had.

But, what about leaders and leadership? Riley mentioned that in the collaborations there

could be more than one leader, and the nice thing about the collaboration was that we

shifted leadership each time there was a group reconfiguration. Similar trends were

reported in Nerantzi and Withell's (2016) research where group participants also did not

explicitly discuss team leadership as part of their work. In their research, the distribution

of activities happened naturally and built upon individual strengths that emerged through

the process of working with one another (Nerantzi & Withell, 2016).

Finally, for Marion, this non-pressure environment also manifested itself in the

approaches taken on projects that they worked on. Marion mentioned bricolage as a

practice of their collaborations.   Bricolage, according to Marion, is not a rigid approach –

in other words, no one is declaring "this is the only way we research in this group." This

iterative process left openings for other collaborators to come in and contribute

interactively. A metaphor that comes to mind is artificial coral reefs. One member of a

collaborative can start with putting up some structure, and through successive iterations,

other collaborators build, extend, tear down, rebuild, and expand the structure

collectively. This type of approach builds an emerging team coherence as defined by Bell

and Kozlowski (2002): it is the team member's collective bond to task interdependencies

and dynamics that provides the capability for teams to self-manage.

Act III: "AHA!" Moments

Catalysts, Leaders, and Team Roles. Another significant observation that

emerged from the conversations with storytellers is the notion of roles within a team, and

closely tied to that is the notion of a catalyst. Marion described catalysts as people

"without whom things would stagnate or not move along. – There were people who are

catalysts in groups [that Marion was a part of] – certain right people at the right time can

move things along." Marion indicated that these individuals aren't necessarily the

overseer of the process, but rather provide key skills, ideas, or frames of view to fellow

collaborators in order to get "unstuck" from wherever point the group was stuck on.

Some participants were identified as consistently being catalysts, while others were

situational catalysts. Research into various collaborative ventures highlights the

importance of leadership (e.g., Hord, 1997; Katz & Earl, 2010; Lammers, Curwood, &

Magnifico, 2012; Stoll & Lewis, 2007; Tarricone & Luca, 2002). Bell and Kozlowski

(2002) indicate that team leaders monitor team members' behaviors and take action as

needed to ensure team performance. While the collaborations that occurred didn't have

designated team leaders, this situational leadership quality could certainly apply to

catalysts. Research into the leadership of teams is beyond the scope of this study;

however, several leadership theories appear relevant when discussing this topic

mentioned by some storytellers. The theories that come to mind are transactional

leadership (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009), leader-member exchange (Avolio et al.,

2009; Hogg et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien, 2003), servant leadership (Avolio et al., 2009),

distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005), and emergent leadership (Yoo & Alavi, 2005;

Misiolek & Heckman, 2005). The following are highlights of these theories and how

they inform this research:

- Emergent leadership, based on what is provided as evidence in Yoo and

  Alavi (2005) and Misiolek and Heckman (2005), can be defined as a type

  of leadership that occurs in teams, virtual or in person, without an

  individual who has an a priori leadership role. An important aspect of

  emergent leadership, according to Yoo and Alavi (2004), is that leadership

  is "spontaneously accorded by fellow team members and as an emergent

phenomenon that develops over time through group processes" (p. 29).

Examples of this might be individual members initiating conversations on

different research threads, or being proactive in compiling resources for

the team.

- Bolden (2011) in his review of distributed leadership theory and research

  quotes Bennett et al. when he describes distributed leadership not as being

  as "something 'done' by an individual 'to' others, or a set of individual

  actions through which people contribute to a group or organization... [it] is

  a group activity that works through and within relationships, rather than

  individual action" (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 3).   According to Spillane

  (2005), there are a variety of ways in which distributed leadership is

  viewed. Some use it interchangeably with the terms shared leadership,

  team leadership, and democratic leadership, while others see it as

  leadership including not one leader, but multiple leaders throughout the

  organization.

- Avolio et al. (2009) describe leader-member exchange (LMX) as a theory

  of leadership that focuses on the relationships between the leader and the

  follower. In this theory, leaders are said to develop different exchange

  relationships with their various followers. The relationship between leader

  and follower has an impact on outcomes. Hence leadership is framed as

  occurring when leaders and followers can develop effective relationships

  that result in mutual and incremental influence. One final theory to

  examine is transformational leadership.

- Avolio et al. (2009) describe transformational leadership behaviors as "leader behaviors that transform and inspire followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest for the good of the organization" (p 423). They further elaborate that transformational leadership theory seems to point to actions on the part of leaders that "raise followers' aspirations and activate their higher-order values (e.g., altruism, and in this case behaviors that are for the betterment of the group rather than the individual) such that followers identify with the leader and his or her mission/vision, feel better about their work, and then work to perform beyond simple transactions and base expectations" (p. 428). Examples of this type of leadership include more seasoned academics encouraging their less experienced colleagues to take the lead on projects and mentor them through stages that they might not be familiar with.

The leadership theories mentioned above resonated as I was searching and re-searching my field texts. Different critical story threads shared by participants in our conversations appeared to point to different leadership theories that could inform the working of leaders in these working groups and how those leaders helped enable group members to perform. In these stories, one leadership theory did not explain everything that was shared. For instance, some of the traits attributed to Riley's leadership skills can be attributed to LMX in certain instances, and to emergent leadership in others. Further research is needed to gain a more accurate assessment of the specifics of leadership in these types of collaborative environments and to determine whether one of these leadership theories better describes these types of collaborations.

Another element that fits into this category is team member roles within the team. Both Shannon and Riley mentioned that it makes a big difference who attends a cMOOC and what their backgrounds are. Given that these collaborations emerged from the course, it makes sense to conclude that who shows up to a collaborative effort, and the skills and attitudes that they bring, impact the collaboration. Team composition impacts how a team functions. In their work, Bell et al. (2018) point to a long history of research that indicates that characteristics of individuals can affect group dynamics. Team composition is defined as the configuration of member attributes, shared affective states, behavioral processes, and cognitive states of teamwork (Bell et al., 2018).

Lane mentioned other collaborations in the Rhizo MOOCs, collaborations that are beyond the scope of this research, that involved music, poetry, song, and creative writing. Some of these are described in Lau (2014). These types of collaborations would not be possible with a different group membership configuration. Finally, Marion mentioned the importance of team roles. In the collaborations that Marion took part in, there appeared to be different skills that people brought to the collaboration, skills that helped facilitate the collaboration. For instance, some participants were experts in the IRB/REB process and ensured that the collaborative research had received appropriate clearances. Others were adept at finding new literature or had access to academic journals and books that fellow team members might not, or brought expertise in certain facets of publishing and editing. All of these together made the teams stronger. The roles, however, were dynamic. More than one person could hold onto a particular role, and roles shifted as group membership shifted. These roles are more expansive than just leadership; leadership was one of those roles that group members could step into. While these don't necessarily fit into a pre-

existing team role model (e.g., Belbin, 2012), they are roles that emerged within these collaborations. Like leadership, member roles varied and morphed, both during specific collaborations and in subsequent group membership remixes. Neratzi and Withell (2016) also indicate that the sharing and rotating of roles can be seen as important to creating a shared understanding between team members, as well as better enabling collaboration. Clarifying team roles is also regarded as an important aspect of team composition (Tarricone & Luca, 2002), even though those roles can adapt and evolve during the lifespan of a group (Goodyear, de Laat, & Lally, 2016).

Permeable Group Membership Membrane. Another "AHA!" moment relates to group membership. Past research into Rhizo14 collaborations indicates group membership is dynamic and changes slightly based on the project in focus (Bali et al., 2016). My findings expand upon the initial research in two ways. First, I would argue that the group membership membrane is more permeable than might have previously been imagined. Individuals are welcomed to join a group endeavor at the beginning of the project, but they are also able to join later in the project's lifecycle. In one example, Riley had decided to not participate in a group early on because circumstances in the real world made participation not possible. When those circumstances changed, Riley requested to join a collaboration that was underway. Thus, group membership is not solidified and closed off at the beginning of the project lifecycle. Additionally, there was another instance where expertise was actively sought for one of the projects, and this expertise did not reside in-group. At first, the expert was peripherally assisting, occupying a consulting role, and as time progressed and other projects came up, this person came closer to the core of the collaborating group. This type of permeability is, perhaps,

something to be expected in connectivist environments such as the Rhizo MOOCs. Beaty

and Howard (2010) indicate that expertise in networked learning rests on shifting and

transient boundaries. Participants of cMOOCs may be seen as more flexible and open in

their approaches to working together with others. Research indicates that teams that have

members who value working with others are more confident and cooperative (Bell et al.,

2018), this participant attitude potentially allows for more permeable group boundaries as

existing members welcome others into their learning circles.

      This permeability is also visible in the adjourning state of collaborative groups.

When considering the Tuckman and Jensen model of group development (1977), one

typically considers *teams* as adjourning; in other words, adjourning is not a phase

typically attributed to *individuals* in that group. However, the permeable membrane of

group membership in these collaborations means that adjournment occurred at the

individual level, not at the group level. While there was a natural end-point to some

collaborations (e.g., a published paper or a delivered conference presentation) members

were free to adjourn before a deliverable was complete. This was observed in one of the

autoethnography collaborations that Marion participated in.

      The natural adjournment point, the completion of a project, can become an

opportunity for re-convening as additional ideas and projects rise to the surface and pique

the interest of the group. Participants may take advantage of the sense of *flow*

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) that they may be experiencing as their state in the collaborative

work experience provides for that sense of high productivity that is enjoyable. Those who

choose to not reconvene for any subsequent group configurations are considered to be

adjourning. Marion offered an exemplar of this whereby one of the group members said

that they enjoyed their time in the collaboration, but they didn't want to do any more writing and preferred to use the rest of their time in Rhizo14 in *make-style* activities where the focus is more artistic (e.g., activities like those in CLMOOC and DS106). Marion pointed out that this member was on the periphery and joined us because they liked the company more than the writing we were doing. In the end, collaboratives were welcoming of diverse types of activities and varying interest levels, and people adjourned at different times. There were many reasons for choosing to adjourn, but a common reason was that members of groups started to peel off from subsequent projects if the projects did not intersect with their interests. Another reason for adjourning was the size of subsequent groups. One of the first collaborations was relatively large, which made it more difficult for participating members to keep track of the group activity. After this larger collaboration was completed, some members expressed a preference for smaller groups rather than participating in collaborations that had a larger number of group members.

In examining the Rhizo MOOC participant blog posts that were written during Rhizo14, I agree with Hamon (2014) who expands upon Cillier's work (2007) by describing boundaries as being created as a consequence of working within specific contexts; when contexts change so do the boundaries. Thus, for Hamon (2014) boundaries are not rigid lines that separate, but rather, boundaries are flexible zones of engagement. Hamon was writing about Rhizo14 course engagement in general, but this describes well some collaboration elements that emerged from the stories shared and from my own experiences.

A Preference for Teams and Continuing Connection. In discussing participants'

"AHA!" moments, one common thread was an interest in working with others and

maintaining the connections that were created. Marion shared that they reached a stage

in their professional development where they disliked working on their own and preferred

to work with others. This wasn't always the case! "I wasn't always this person"

comments Marion, and continues, "actually I hated working groups, I hated

collaborating, they were the worst experiences I had at the university. We're working with

these other people. I didn't want to work with them. They didn't want to work with me."

Some projects need to be done by oneself due to academic or professional limitations,

but, according to Marion, it is much more fulfilling to work with others. Shannon

mentioned that individual (single-author) scholarship is fine, and something that they had

to do "just enough of" in order to secure employment in academia, but it just isn't as

exciting as the collaborative experiences they had.

Riley also commented on finding ways to maintain connections and continuing to

know the people they worked with. Shannon also lamented the lack of contemporary

cMOOCs which served both as a course and as a means to bring these types of learning

communities together. I use the term "learning community" here to refer to a

congregation of learners, in a given space, that come together to learn and share a

concern for at least some of their fellow co-learners. In this formulation of a learning

community, the responsibility for learning is shared amongst community members and

each contribution enables another to contribute. This is similar in definition to McConnell

(2006) who describes learning communities as places where community members pose

problems and collectively and dialogically investigate them; where a variety of roles exist

in the community; and the outcomes of these communities are the creation and sharing of expertise.

Learning communities, as a concept, suffer from the same issue as collaboration and cooperation. The term "learning community" is often used without explicit definition (Kilpatrick, Jones, & Barrett, 2003). It has a variety of different meanings in education (Cox, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Stoll, Bollam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Tinto, 2003), as well as having different meanings across industries and disciplines (e.g., Hill, 1996), thus for some, it is an ambiguous buzzword (Brower & Dettinger, 1998; Kaplan, 2002; Riel & Polin, 2004). Learning communities, for example, can describe the concept that traces its origin to Meikljohn's work at the University of Wisconsin in 1927 (Kellogg, 1999). This work revolves around learners, more specifically undergraduate students. These types of learning communities have at least five different models (Kellogg, 1999). Learning communities can refer to Professional Learning Communities (Hord, 1997), Networked Learning Communities, which is the digital version of PLCs (Jackson & Temperley, 2007; Katz & Earl, 2010) and are also referred to as Online Learning Communities (Khoo & Cowie, 2011). Finally, there are also learning communities that connect specifically to the Community of Inquiry framework (e.g., Shea, 2007).[20]

It is important to note that not everything was rosy all the time in these collaborations. Some storytellers shared that there were people who were unpleasant at

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[20] For examples of the different types of learning communities please see the following: Brower & Dettinger, 1998; Butler & Schnellert, 2020; Dodge & Kendall, 2004; Eteläpelto & Lahti, 2008; Hord, 1997; Jackson & Temperley, 2007; Kaplan, 2002; Katz & Earl, 2010; Kilbane, 2009; Kellogg, 1999; Khoo & Cowie, 2011; Krutka, Carpenter, and Trust, 2017; Liu, Magjuka, Bonk, & Lee, 2007; Parker, 2009; Prestridge, 2019; Rheingold, 1993; Ricoy & Feliz, 2016; Riel & Polin, 2004; Stoll et al., 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007; Veletsianos, 2012.

times, and there were people that they might not work with in the future, but they

wouldn't necessarily take anything back or change the past. Like Lane, many storytellers

enjoyed the collaboration and had lots of fun, and others gained the confidence to share

what they knew in larger groups. This type of enjoyment derived from collaboration, and

the development of additional skills, gaining a confidence boost, and maintaining

connections with past collaborators were themes that emerged from the MRT group as

well (Koutropoulos, 2016).

Exploring New Horizons, Gaining New Skills, and Self-Discovery. Shannon

described being part of the collaborations in Rhizo14 as being some of the most exciting

academic work that they'd been part of, and this academic work was done in

collaboration with some of the most exciting people they'd had the opportunity to get to

know. The collaborations brought a "freshness" and engagement that was not available to

them locally. The diversity of participants also enabled Lane to learn more about topics

that didn't necessarily have immediate applicability. Lane could be described as having a

greater background in quantitative research, and the collaborations that Lane took part in

were qualitative in nature. The process of writing certain collaborative papers was

described as fun by many participants, and there was a great degree of pride associated

with those papers. Collaboration, as Marion said, "just got really easy over a period of

time," perhaps alluding to experiencing a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Shannon commented that they "thought that embodied in a live sort of way, or at least as

live as a static document can be, [they] thought [the collaborations] embodied the things

that were happening in the [course]". That embodied experience is also something that

was mentioned by Riley who viewed the research methodologies used as affirming life

experience and being empowered to tell your own story rather than have someone else

interpret it and tell it for you. However, following that fun, there were also some low

points because, in certain instances, there were issues in getting these papers to

publication. From my perspective as a participant, this was demoralizing because I

thought we had done great work, but as Riley pointed out, this challenge promoted

resilience building. What was shared reifies that these types of collaborative experiences

can be transformative, something initially discussed in earlier literature (Bali et al., 2016).

As Mackness et al. (2016) indicate, for most participants the value of the course

experience lay in "the spirit of exploration, openness, experimentation, of trying new

things" (p. 78), something which seems to have translated into the group experiences.

      Two final learning self-discovery experiences were an evaluation (or re-evaluation

in some cases) as to the nature of *openness* and an assessment of what were the aspects of

our collaborations that kept us going. First, storytellers were open, both in the *open*

educators sense (Tur, Havemann, Marsh, Keefer, & Nascimbeni, 2020) and open to

sharing. This was evident in one of the projects that emerged, the collaborative

autoethnography of Rhizo14 learning. The project initially started with about 30

participants contributing a story to the initial document. I was part of this project.

Through conversations with my storytellers, I was reminded of an *incident* in which other

researchers had used our *open* data for this autoethnography for a project that they were

working on. We were not aware that they had done this, and they were not contributing

members to our Rhizo14 learning community. We discovered their access to "our" data

when we serendipitously "bumped into them" at a conference we were both presenting.

Marion summarizes the feelings of most storytellers when they say "because if they'd

asked us, we [could have] just said *'yeah, of course, you can use them! Delighted!'*" This sort of incident may have made some collaborators question their stance on openness. Another self-reflection element that emerged was that completed deliverables fueled an increase in motivation to continue participating in these collaborative groups. If all we'd done over the years is chat about Rhizomatic Learning (or other common areas of interest) we might have drifted apart, whereas each punctuation to a collaborative experience (e.g., a final deliverable of some sort) brought a breath of fresh air into collaborations and allowed for a remixing of the group membership. Receiving awards (or nomination for an award in some instances) was also motivating and connected to completing work. This is similar to the initial findings in the MobiMOOC team (Koutropoulos, 2016), where we identified external reward mechanisms, such as conference and paper awards, as motivating factors to continue working together.

Act IV: Metathemes

       Metatheme I – Collaborations Need a Sandbox. One of the metathemes woven into the conversations was how interconnected the Rhizocourses were to the collaborations that occurred. Some participants saw the collaborations as being just a small part of their overall course experience. Some participants connected the specific collaborations explored in this project to the overall course as well as to other participants in the course. These connections indicate links between the two joint problem spaces, even if those other course participants were not in the collaborations that occurred. Many metaphors were used to describe this, such as a sandbox, a hive, throwing a party, or going to camp. All of these bring forth the mental image of having a space that is not only conducive to these activities but also actively promotes their serendipitous creation.

This is further amplified by some storytellers who have continued to vocalize a wish for a relaunch of the Rhizo MOOCs, or for someone to offer compelling cMOOCs so that a launching point for such engagement can exist. As several of the storytellers indicated, the cMOOC is impacted by those who attend that course, and you can't know in advance how good of a learning experience it's going to be until you're actually in it. Borrowing from Schrödinger's famous thought experiment (Blackburn, 2008), this might be best summarized as a type of Schrödinger's cMOOC learning experience: The learning experience in a cMOOC exists both as an inferior learning experience and a life-changing experience until a learner joins and participates, at which point one of those outcomes materializes. The course itself serves as an incubator for these types of collaborative experiences to emerge, but it's the participants that make it happen. Without the course acting as an incubator, participants would not have this space to explore. Zweig (2011) proposed the term structured serendipity where creativity can be enhanced by the environment in which activity takes place. Zweig gives the example of exposing himself to different fields that are new to him by reading a scientific paper each week from other fields. This is similar to what I've observed in cMOOCs where individuals from different disciplines come together in a joint space to explore. Each brings their own backgrounds and knowledge, which ultimately, according to Zweig's structured serendipity, enhances creativity. This breaking down of boundaries and the exploration of learning and knowledge at the boundaries was commented upon both in regard to the Rhizo courses and the collaborations that storytellers were a part of.

Informally, I've been referring to these types of spaces as *incubators* or *Petri dishes,* but other terms exist. At the time that the Rhizo courses were offered, some

participants called them a *community of practice*. A community of practice is a

community of members who are bound by what they are doing together (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger further explains that a community of practice is about joint enterprise,

relationships of mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire of communal resources (p.

2). The community of practice is described to have a five-tiered stage of development

which starts at a "potential" phase where people face similar situations without the

benefit of shared practice, to a "memorable" phase where the community is no longer

central, however, the people who were involved remember it as a significant part of their

identities (1998, p. 3). Communities of practice have been studied in both online and

face-to-face organizations (McLure Wasko & Faraj, 2000; Gray, 2004; Ardichvili, Page,

& Wentling, 2003). Communities of practice can be seen as ways of not only solving

problems of common interest to its members, but also a forum to spread best practices,

and to develop the skills of some members (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). To this end,

communities of practice can be seen as part of a social learning system (Wenger, 1998)

where members engage in the community to not only learn something new from their

joint research but also learn from one another.

Some members are not as fond of the term community of practice as a descriptor

of what we did, and they adopted the term *affinity space*. Gee (2005) describes affinity

spaces as being a space where participants pursue common endeavors, a space that is

shared between masters and newbies, a space that encourages individual and distributed

knowledge, a space that honors tacit knowledge, where leadership is porous and leaders

are resources, and where there are many different forms and paths to participation. Gee

(2017) indicates that affinity spaces are "squishy and not well-bounded" (p.28), whereas

Lammers (2012) describes them as both permeable and interconnected spaces. This is important to keep in mind because it was observed that permeability exists with regard to group membership, as described above, and the interconnectedness was demonstrated by the multiple paths that participants took to arrive at the Rhizo MOOCs. Dunne and Rawlins (2000) report that feelings of friendship and membership in a community can be strengthened through teamwork, which can be seen in this context with individual group members wishing to continue to work with others past those natural punctuation points of a project. Adair (1986) also points out that groups aren't purely utilitarian, but rather "provide you with a series of unique opportunities to grow as a person" (as cited in Dunne & Rawlins, 2000, p. 363). Affinity spaces can be found in many varying contexts, both ones that involve learning and ones that do not[21].

Another term that emerged from the literature is a virtual learning community (Allan & Lewis, 2006). In the work of Allan and Lewis, a virtual learning community offered a path to lifelong learning whereby the importance of the learning community was in providing a safe place from which participants could develop and change. A virtual learning community might not be as apt a term for this *incubator* space for reasons discussed in the next section.

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[21] A deep exploration of affinity spaces is beyond the scope of this work. For examples please see: Bommarito, 2014; Branch-Mueller, de Groot, Stephens, Jones, Salerno, & Orobio, 2014; Curwood, Magnifico & Lammers, 2013; Edwards, 2018; Gates, Della-Piana, & Bernat, 1997; Honeychurch & Patrick, 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Lammers, 2012; Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012; Lewis, 2014; Mota, Morais, Moreira, & Paiva, 2017; Przymus & Romo Smith, 2021; Rosenberg, Greenhalgh, Koehler, Hamilton, & Akcaoglu, 2016; Sharma & Land, 2018; Trust, Carpenter, & Krutka, 2017

Figure 3. Photo by Milada Vigerova on Unsplash[22]

In considering the space in which these collaborations take place, and what to call

that space, it's important to acknowledge that different people perceive different criteria

for inclusion and exclusion in their definitions. Gee (2004, 2017) sees communities of

practice as being different than affinity spaces. Jones, Stephens, Branch-Mueller, and de

Groot (2016), on the other hand, see communities of practice and affinity spaces as

overlapping. If one steps back a bit further to examine learning communities, and the

varying definitions that encompass that term, an interesting image emerges: The space

where we congregate and our individual connecting practices are polymorphic. Different

individuals will affiliate with different aspects of the sandbox that all group members

play in. Hence, it is important to consider the space as one with many different attributes

that are shaped by the places, practices, and participants in it, rather than a framework

that shapes that space and how individuals fit into it. A visual that symbolizes this fluidity

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[22] Photo credit URL: https://unsplash.com/photos/UdQTxWRdazY

is that in Figure 3. The Rhizo MOOC exists in the background, while different concepts

that explain the actions and interactions of various members and groups are depicted as

circles, still blurry, that intersect with each other as interactions evolve and shape that

communal space.

       Metatheme II – Education vs. Learning. Another thread that emerged was the

notion of *Learning* vs. *Education,* or as one storyteller framed it metaphorically: love vs.

marriage. Lane commented that education is much more structured, education usually

operates within the core of what is known and codified as knowledge and relevant

applicable practice. It is foundational. Education doesn't necessarily push at the

boundaries, and when it does it's in defined ways, within the boundaries of a seminar, for

example. Couros (n.d.) provides some additional attributes to education. He states that

education starts with looking for answers, that is, it is about compliance, standardization,

and that it's time-bound. And, finally, education is about content consumption that is

sequential in nature, in other words, a student completes the first course before

attempting the next course in the sequence.

       Rhizo MOOCs, on the other hand, operated in the realm of learning, and so did

the ensuing collaborations that were explored in this research. Based on the

conversations with my storytellers, learning is something that happens in the periphery of

knowing. It is a practice that pushes up against boundaries to see how permeable,

flexible, malleable, or absolute they are. This type of pushing at the boundaries

sometimes means that the safe space of knowing what to expect does not exist, and why I

think the term *virtual learning community* does not apply to what happened in the

Rhizomatic MOOCs and the ensuing collaborations. While participants mentioned trust

and respect for others as existing within their collaborations, that does not negate the fact

that when our assumptions were challenged that we did not feel intellectually threatened

in some way. Learning can be a true *cacophony* as communication is exchanged amongst

different people all at the same time. As a participant, "you might get some of it, and you

might not understand it right away" as Shannon mentioned. It's a dynamic process that

can be ambiguous at times and require clarification.

Couros (n.d.) also offers his own definition of learning. He indicates that learning

begins by asking questions. This connects with narrative inquiry because Narrative

Inquiries begin with a sense of wonder! In a learning environment questions also beget

other questions, which draws similar parallels to that sense of search and re-search in

narrative inquiry. Couros (n.d.) indicates that learning is social, personal, is not time-

bound, and is about creating. In a learning environment, as framed by Couros (n.d.),

learning is non-linear, and participants are both learners and teachers; and it's about

challenging those perceived norms.

Several participants mentioned an incident early in the first Rhizo course where

there was a group of participants that wanted to explore the canonical Deleuze and

Guattari through a frame of teaching and learning. This wasn't a problem, but it appears

they expected the rest of the course community to have the same goals, and engage with

the materials in the same way. However, there was an intellectual pushback to this notion

of treating the Rhizo MOOC as *education*. If some participants wanted to treat the

experience as *education*, rather than as *learning*, which is how it was originally

conceived by many participants, that was perfectly fine, but those individuals should not

have imposed their world views of how the space should operate for others. In the end,

those individuals departed from the community early on (Mackness & Bell, 2015), but

the incident was memorable to many participants. In re-searching the field texts, it is

unclear what effect this had on collaborations that ensued, but it does provide further

credence to the idea that collaborations were seen as connected with that affinity space

created by the Rhizo MOOC, rather than as a separate space.

Metatheme III – HOMAGO, for Adults. One of the broad aspects that emerged

from the conversations with my storytellers was the element of fun. The collaborations

were fun. The collaborations were engaging. Some people participated in the course as a

type of pastime. There is no singular way of describing this, and this might make for a

great topic for further research. Some previous research on MOOCs has called this

phenomenon *edutainment* (Zheng et al., 2015), however, edutainment is the wrong term

to describe this motivation, even though it was only used as a placeholder. Edutainment is

defined as learning through the use of entertainment (Zorica, 2014). In the last decade,

this blending of entertainment and education has manifested itself in the use of video

games for learning and game-based learning more broadly (Zorica, 2014). Some

colleagues, and fellow Rhizo MOOC participants, suggest that lifelong learning might be

an appropriate term. A traditional definition for lifelong learning is "all learning activity

undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and

competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective"

(European Commission, 2001, p. 9). A more succinct version is presented by the

European Commission as "all forms of learning undertaken by adults after having left

initial education and training" (2006, p. 2). Provided these definitions, I agree that these

types of activities can be organized under the overall umbrella of lifelong learning, but

the element of fun, entertainment, that communal space for being with others, and being

open to serendipity are missing from these definitions.

      If lifelong learning doesn't quite describe this *joie d' apprendre*, what might be

some alternative terms that encapsulate this feeling? In my notes from 2015, I had kept a

note that one participant described what they did as *serious leisure*, calling attention to

Stebbins' (1992) work. I thought this might be an interesting question to crowdsource on

Twitter, so I posted an inquiry to my network of colleagues who still follow the #rhizo

hashtag. Some suggested the term *hard fun,* coined by Quinn (2005). He describes *hard*

fun learning as "it's fun, in the sense that you're engaged, there is a story that you care

about, and you have the power to act; it's hard in that it's not trivial— there is sufficient

challenge to keep you on your toes" (Quinn, 2005, p. 10). This didn't quite fit the

description, so some colleagues suggested coining the portmanteau *plearning*[23] for

playful learning (Station, 2021), or using the term *Joyful Inquiry* (Knight, 2021). The

Twitter-brainstorming session also suggested the term I was looking for might be related

to the notion of an *infinite game* (Finite and Infinite Games, n.d.). There were other fun

suggestions for coining terms using Greek + "agogy" (e.g., Crosslin, 2021), so two

potential terms that came to mind were *kefagogy* (kefi + agogy) for *learning in a state of*

high spirits, and *pareagogy* (parea + agogy) for *learning with good company*. While I

offered these two terms to my Twitter interlocutors in jest, the question remains: Was

there a term that encompasses engaging in learning activities as a pastime, without

necessarily having a defined outcome and leaving yourself open to possibilities? This

brought to the fore the question of process versus product in these collaborations. The

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[23] pronounced as /plɜrnɪŋ/

research literature suggests that learners enjoy collaboration more when there isn't a joint

assessment at the conclusion of such collaborations (e.g., Ku, Tseng, & Akarasriworn,

2013; Macdonald, 2003), however, as Britton, Simper, Leger, and Stephenson (2017)

point out, there is a conceptual vagueness of the word *teamwork* and they indicate that

there are divergent meanings of what effective teamwork is. Britton et al. (2017) report

that some researchers define effective teamwork by successful products produced, while

others point to the quality and nature of individual contributions. In the end, there is a

fine balance to be achieved. As Marion commented, we enjoyed each other's company

and we learned a lot from one another, but if we never produced anything tangible, we

would have gone our separate ways. Discovering what that balance is, and how to qualify

it, can be the topic of further research.

One final term that emerged from the Twitter brainstorm is #HOMAGO, or

"Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out" (Ito et al., 2009). The overall idea

with HOMAGO we learn "along [a] kind of axis or overlapping Venn diagram that

includes the most casual (Hanging Out), proceeds to a more active and engaged, if still

very diffuse mode (Messing Around), to a more focused and productive mode (Geeking

Out)" (Friedman, 2014). A handful of Rhizo14 and Rhizo15 participants on Twitter

identified themselves as practicing HOMAGO in their MOOC experiences, even though

HAMOGO was framed with learning done by children. Perhaps *HOMAGO for adults*

will have to suffice for now as one reason people collaborated.

Metatheme IV – Searching for Kindred Spirits on the Network(s). One final

metatheme that emerged was about seeking intellectual stimulation that may not have

been available through one's own local environment. Everyone who contributed a story

in this research is employed in a higher education setting. Despite this, many have found

that the types of learning that they were seeking, i.e., the type of activities that pushed

boundaries, were not necessarily available with colleagues who were geographically

proximal to them. While PLCs (Hord, 1997) and NLCs (Jackson & Temperley, 2007)

have existed to fill similar gaps in professional practice, there could be many factors

preventing these types of "extended jam sessions," as one storyteller put it, from

materializing. PLCs and NLCs are centrally organized, not unlike joining a professional

association, and the organizers may not fully understand the needs of individual

educators. These types of learning community approaches also leave little room for

structured serendipity (Zweig, 2011). However, those who participated in the Rhizo

MOOCs took a PLN approach to professional development by finding their kindred

spirits – those people who will extend your thinking and are willing to go on that

boundary-pushing journey with you. This is something that Rhizo MOOC participants

had experienced in the past in cMOOCs (e.g., PLENK, CCK, MobiMOOC, EDCMOOC)

and similar affinity spaces (e.g., DS106, CLMOOC). cMOOCs have also demonstrated

that research emerges from the participants that are part of the affinity space (examples of

which include, but are not limited to: de Waard et al., 2011; Fini, 2009; Mackness, Mak,

& Williams, 2010; Bali et al., 2015), and the experience is focused on *learning*, not

education.

In comparison, xMOOCs have tended to focus on *education*, they replicate

existing power structures, practices, and silos; and research that stems from them is *a*

priori. The research questions and instruments are created to measure something in

xMOOCs, for example, whether or not the default paths in a MOOC impact learner

engagement (e.g., Brunskill, Zimmaro, & Thille, 2018). One storyteller mentioned that most people in xMOOCs are *forgettable* in some sense because they are just another name in a discussion forum. cMOOCs, or xMOOCs that blend connectivist elements, make participant interactions more memorable between participants, and help foster those connections. Given the intellectual engagement in cMOOCs, and the sense of fun, play, and learning that occurred, it is no wonder that former participants wish to engage in similar affinity spaces after the conclusion of these Rhizo MOOCs.

Act V: Wrapping up

Conclusions. I return to the question that led me through this journey: Why did we collaborate? The answer is neither succinct nor simple, however, several salient points emerged through my search and re-search. First, the reason why people formed, or joined, these emerging research groups were similar to the reasons that collaborators joined the Rhizo MOOCs. They were interested in exploring certain facets of teaching and learning, and they became part of an online community of similarly interested peers because they couldn't find that environment in their geographically proximal networks. An inquisitiveness about certain topics and approaches was the overarching reason that brought people together. It was an opportunity to experiment and learn.

Second, once those initial groups formed, collaborator motivations to re-engage in a subsequent collaborative activity, with different permutations of group members, was either a function of the focus of the inquiry (i.e., was the problem the group focused on of personal interest?) or of developing social connections (i.e., people would consider subsequent collaborations in a minimally interesting project if the right people were

involved). This social aspect of group collaboration shines a light on the importance of social bonds within teams.

Finally, there were social and technological elements that made collaborating more seamless. For example, Google Docs, and the then-new feature of suggestions, enabled a new type of writing and collaboration where multiple authors could be working in a document at the same time, see other people's contributions in real-time, and have conversations in the margins about the work being done. The margins were no longer only for comments and for editorial support, but rather they became a digital space for the sharing of ideas, exploration of elements in the main document, and discussion and debate. This allowed for more innovative group interactions and group cognition. The limitations of technologies that mediated the previous collaborative efforts were viewed as dampening the true potential of working together, and this "aha" moment could only be identified once people had experienced what was possible with newer technologies that debuted around the time as the Rhizo MOOCs.

Future Research. A narrative inquiry is a snapshot of a metaphorical parade. My research is also a snapshot that engaged my sense of wonder for threads that were connected to my findings. While it is impossible to enumerate all the threads that have piqued my interest through the process of researching my research puzzle, there are a few notable standouts. One area of future research is researching the aspect of plurivocality in such collaborations, and in the collaborative workspaces. Many authors converge on a document and become part of its creation. The edges of the many voices are smoothed over by the multiple contributions of diverse authors. In the end, it may not be possible to identify who wrote what. This workspace is a contested space; a space where ideas,

arguments, and intellectual exchanges contribute to the unique identities of the researchers and the groups that work on it. These exchanges also bring with them a cacophony; an element that may energize some members and may put others off. Investigating the productive effects of cacophony on plurivocal texts and collaborations is an interesting future direction.

Finally, a second research path to explore is the element of fun in engaging in open learning activities such as MOOCs, and any collaborations that may come from them. Different terms emerged to try to describe this sense of fun that was derived from voluntary learning activities with others. Due to the multiple terms that people identified in their attempt to explain this phenomenon, I believe that a more in-depth exploration of what fun means in these contexts would help us better understand how we can harness this sense of enjoyment in learning in broader academic contexts.

To be continued…

Chapter 6: Epilogue

A Note to the Reader

This chapter is the concluding chapter for this research project. It serves the purpose of providing an element of closure, both for the research and for Aliki's adventures in the Rhizo24 MOOC. As part of this chapter, I am also including some expanded ideas for future research. Like Chapter 4, this chapter was created to be read as a story, a story *in the midst*. Since it was Dave Cormier's interest in Deleuze and Guattari's work that ultimately created the space for these collaborations to emerge, it would be a missed opportunity to not mention that "a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25). In using a story approach this chapter fits within the narrative style of the restory presented in Chapter 4. Like Chapter 4, and because as narrative inquirers we lean into *the midst* in which we find ourselves in, I am inviting you, the reader, to apply your own layer of analysis to the story presented in this chapter. Are there connections and contexts that you see from your own positions in teaching, practice, and research? If you are a doctoral student looking for examples of narrative inquiry, how does the story presented here connect with your collaborative experiences? Given that it is a type of fictional narrative I am not strictly adhering to APA formatting rules to present it visually like the narrative it is meant to be, rather than a traditional research report.

September 13, 2021

Friday afternoon, at the end of a busy week. The fall semester on Aliki's campus had begun last week. Faculty were busy getting materials for their courses ready, students were busy getting back into the rhythm of school for this academic year, and staff, like Aliki, were busy making it all work seamlessly – or at least *appearing* seamless to the casual observer. Aliki's final seminar, her *dissertation proposal seminar*, was starting today. Technically, last week was the official start but the class session was mostly about gently bringing the learning community back into the flow of the semester, explaining the expectations for the seminar, and giving people an opportunity to reacquaint themselves with their cohort mates. Most have maintained connections via some social media tool

over the summer, but that joint space, that aspect of *eventedness* – as Dave would say – made those connections feel *different* somehow.

It was 4 pm and Aliki was back at her favorite table at one of the campus cafés. The table was away enough from others, to avoid getting interrupted, but close enough to be able to hear to hum of indecipherable voices in the background; a sound that served as the campus white noise soundtrack. It helped her think. This table also had some really great views of the quad. Aliki was pondergazing[24] through the giant glass windows while sipping her afternoon mountain tea. She had a seminar in a couple of hours and needed to come up with some potential leads for her dissertation's *research question*.

It's all fun and games, and free-range learning, she thought to herself, *until you have to come up with a darned research topic…*

Aliki pulled a paper notebook out of her bag. She'd taken various notes on threads of inquiry that had piqued her interest over the past few months, including threads that came out of *Camp Rhizo*. Some notes were indecipherable. It's times like these she wishes that she had slowed down to write better notes, or just write notes with a little more detail. She was wondering what she meant when she wrote "discourse analysis of perpetual MOOCers"?

She took another sip of her tea. *No sense in worrying about the notes I can't decipher,* she thought; after all, she had loads more notes than she knew what to do with. She only really needed a handful of good leads for tonight's group discussion anyway. She started jotting down ideas in a digital notebook on her laptop, something she could share with her classmates for a collective brainstorm later on.

She read her first note out loud: "there seem to be a number of multiple-author papers and presentations coming out of connectivist MOOCs. What's up with that? Is there a story behind this?" She took a sip of her tea and thought to herself *Huh!... good question. I*

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[24] Pondergaze *verb*. When you're gazing off in an apparent daze while in deep thought.

wonder if any of the rhizo24 folks want to talk about it…a bridge for another day

perhaps.

Aliki starts writing another note: Week 12 ½ of Rhizo14. *I forgot to ask participants*

about this, she reminds herself. Seems like someone was having fun with numbers back

in Rhizo14. Week 12 ½ , or… Week 1212…or…testing 1212… After all, that was the

last recorded learner-driven extension of Rhizo14. It's possible that someone was just

making light of that. That word had a way of coming back to her. *Fun*. Was there

something there? What role does *fun* play in such *affinity spaces*? Affinity spaces – a

word she'd come across reading AK's dissertation. Also, something mentioned by people

she met in Rhizo24. Maybe that's a topic to explore. After all, Rhizo24 was a lot of fun

for her as well. She jotted this down as a topic to discuss tonight in her digital notebook.

Flipping through a few more pages, she read a note about hospitality. What did this

mean? Aliki dug a bit through her notebook for some sort of *eureka* moment. How does

one encourage hospitality in such large affinity spaces? She had come across an article or

two on this topic[25]. These articles seemed to have been about another affinity space, but

maybe this is useful for connectivist MOOCs? Or maybe just forget about the MOOC

altogether and focus on *virtually connecting* and similar spaces?[26] Another candidate

topic for tonight's discussion.

Flipping through a few more pages of scribbled notes, she is reminded of the power of

storytelling. There were academic collaborations that used stories, there were other rhizo

collaborations that also involved multimedia storytelling of some sort. Even AK's

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[25] See Bali, M., Caines, A., Hogue, R. J., DeWaard, H. J., & Friedrich, C. (2019). Intentionally
equitable hospitality in hybrid video dialogue: The context of Virtually Connecting. *eLearn,*
2019(5).
See also Caines, A., Bali, M., DeWaard, H., & Friedrich, C. (2020, April) Intentionally Equitable
Hospitality in Practice: reflections on caring for ourselves, each other, and the planet. Presented at
Open20: The Care in Openess, Online Conference. Retrieved from:
https://oer20.oerconf.org/sessions/o-051/members/
[26] See here for virtually connecting: http://virtuallyconnecting.org/ ; CLMOOC
(https://clmooc.com/) and DS106 (https://ds106.us/) have also been described as affinity spaces
by participants.

dissertation was a story – at least to some extent. This made Aliki ponder about the power that *stories* have as *a medium* for learning. Someone must have studied this, no? "OK Aliki, just add it to the list," she told herself. At this rate, it looked like Aliki wanted to create a study out of *everything*. Maybe this is normal for a doctoral student…

The hour was getting late, and the seminar was in half an hour. Pondergazing at the quad as the sun was setting had taken up a lot of Aliki's time, but it also provided that space to do some free-thinking. She jotted down some ideas about *incubators* for collaboration and *bricolage*. She wasn't as familiar with the term *bricolage,* so she made a note to contact Marion on Twitter to see what Marion meant by it. She also wrote down the word *collaboration*. She recalled that AK had an allergic reaction to the term back at *Camp Rhizo* – well, not really an allergic reaction, but he definitely did not seem like a fan. Seriously, half the room must have heard that *groan*, but there's probably a story behind that too. She made a note to do some electronic digging tomorrow on collaboration and cooperation. She wanted to look beyond the two or three articles that were presented in her introductory seminars. Maybe there was something there. Maybe something that ties to that *multiauthor* trend in connectivist MOOCs. She'd read AK's dissertation after *Camp Rhizo*, and she'd taken some notes, but she needed to refresh her memory.

<div align="center">

beep   **beep**   **beep**

</div>

That's the ten-minute warning. *I'd best be off to class,* she thought to herself.   She took one last sip of her mountain tea – which had gone cold by now – and started moseying to class. She gazed at her calendar and realized that it was Friday. Good thing she's not superstitious. This should be interesting!

September 14, 2021

beep   **beep**   **beep**

Aliki's morning wake-up alarm was going off, but Aliki had been awake for a couple of hours now and she was working on her computer as the sun was rising. Last night's seminar was *invigorating*. She received some interesting thoughts, ideas, and feedback from her fellow classmates and decided to do some initial investigative work into the research literature. One of the areas the piqued the interest of her peers was this whole arena of collaboration. Maybe this could turn out to be something of interest to her classmates as well.

Aliki started by looking at AK's reference list from his dissertation and started getting those articles. She also conducted some initial searches on *Google Scholar* to see what other research she could find. More searches through the library's academic databases might be needed later if this seemed like a promising rabbit hole, but *Google Scholar* was a good start. After downloading close to one hundred articles, she decided that it was time to stop. At this point, it felt more like *digital hoarding* than finding research literature. What good was downloading more articles if she hadn't evaluated what she had on hand?

It's still early, she thought. Maybe a good opportunity to get breakfast, enjoy the sunrise, and come back to this after a coffee cup refill.

~~ time passes ~~

It was now afternoon. Aliki had spent the day immersing herself in the *collaboration*, *cooperation*, and sometimes *coordination*, and *competition*, research literature. She had decided to take the broad view and not just focus on education so she could benefit from a broader perspective. This *may* have been a *bad idea*, …in retrospect. These terms…terms that once seemed *crystal clear* were now driving her batty.

When she started this process, she had expected that people would be conflating collaboration and cooperation, but this was another level of *terminological madness*.   In one instance collaboration was the superordinate category with cooperation and coordination stemming from it as different types of collaboration[27], and in this case coordination was defined as the linking, meshing, synchronization, and alignment of actions. Other researchers[28], on the other hand, defined collaboration *broadly* as meaning active engagement and interaction among group members to achieve some common goal. Siemens[29], …in one of the older MOOCs…, summarizes discussions from that MOOC which indicate that learner-learner interactions can be thought of as being on a continuum, with collaboration and cooperation being on that continuum. It's interesting that for Siemens, collaboration is *the lesser* of the two activities, which contradicts Bruffee[30]…*fascinating!*

And, of course, there are other researchers[31] that point out that other terms like project-based learning, teamwork, and team-based learning are terms that are often used without a clear distinction, and conflated with collaborative learning.

Oh, wait…! thought Aliki to herself while rolling her eyes.

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[27] See Gulati, R., Wohlgezogen, F., & Zhelyazkov, P. (2012). The two facets of collaboration: Cooperation and coordination in strategic alliances. Academy of Management Annals, 6(1), 531-583.

[28] See Nokes-Malach, T. J., Richey, J. E., & Gadgil, S. (2015). When is it better to learn together? Insights from research on collaborative learning. Educational Psychology Review, 27(4), 645-656.

[29] See Siemens, G. (2007) Interaction. eLearnSpace. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20070704123555/http://elearnspace.org/Articles/interaction.htm

[30] See Bruffee, K. A. (1995). Sharing our toys: Cooperative learning versus collaborative learning. Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 27(1), 12-18.

[31] See Staubitz, T., & Meinel, C. (2018, October). Collaborative Learning in MOOCs Approaches and Experiments. In 2018 IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference (FIE) (pp. 1-9). IEEE.

Let's also not forget researchers[32] who just dispense with what others say – and…really… who can blame them? – and just start off their papers with: for the purposes of this paper, we define collaboration as…. A deep guttural groan was heard throughout the empty apartment. Aliki could understand why these researchers just defined their terms and simply moved on, but this posed a challenge to her as a PhD student…

The use of the terms collaboration and cooperation was just a mess. It was time to take a break from all this and catch some fresh air.

~~ time passes ~~

It was now evening and Aliki had her television streaming a video of a fireplace that she found on *YouTube*. It was calming background noise; those virtual crackling timbers allowed her to think more clearly. At times her brain played tricks on her and provided the olfactory illusion of burning wood. She was reflecting on the day's readings and wondering if *collaboration* would truly be a productive topic. It seemed like she needed to disentangle the disagreements in the field first before she could be productive, and would this be a productive use of her time as a doctoral candidate? She wasn't sure. Maybe she also needed a *Plan B* in case this didn't pan out.

Aliki logs into Twitter. She had been following along and lurking in a community of doctoral students from around the world. A sort of *global accountability* group to help each other complete their doctoral work. Today's question for the group was:

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[32] An example of which is the following, but they aren't the only ones: Zigurs, I., & Munkvold, B. E. (2014). Collaboration Technologies, Tasks and Contexts. Human-Computer Interaction and Management Information Systems: Applications. Advances in Management Information Systems, 143-170.

Aliki didn't usually participate in things like these, but today was a rather frustrating day. Aliki was feeling a little cheeky, so she decided to share her daily thoughts:
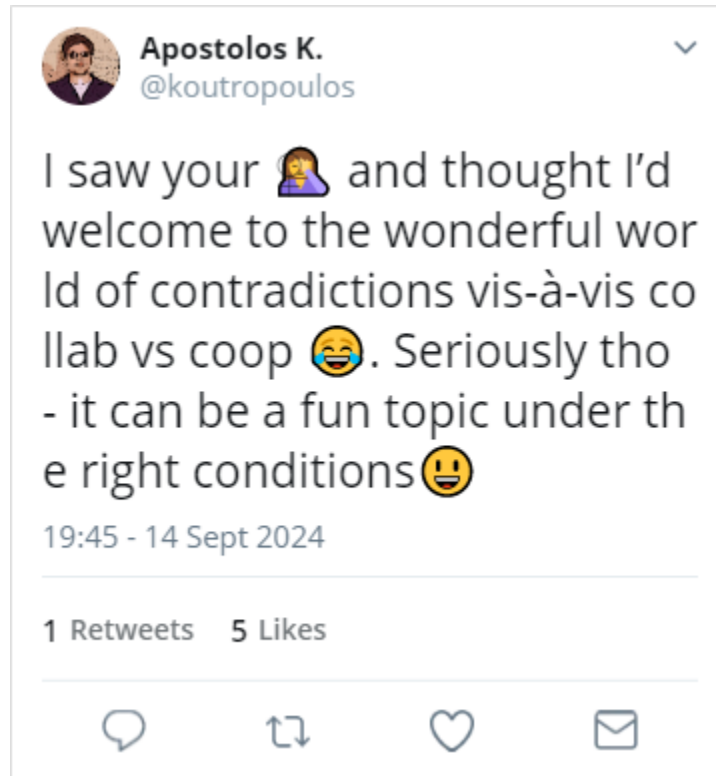
She felt good getting it off her chest. There were a few *likes* and *retweets* of her post, and several virtual *nods* and virtual *"I totally agree!"* responses. Aliki guessed that she wasn't the only one that has encountered this unintentional logic bomb[34]. Tomorrow she'd follow up on some alternate ideas for research. For now, she shut off her laptop

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[33] Custom tweets created with https://fakedetail.com/fake-twitter-tweet-generator
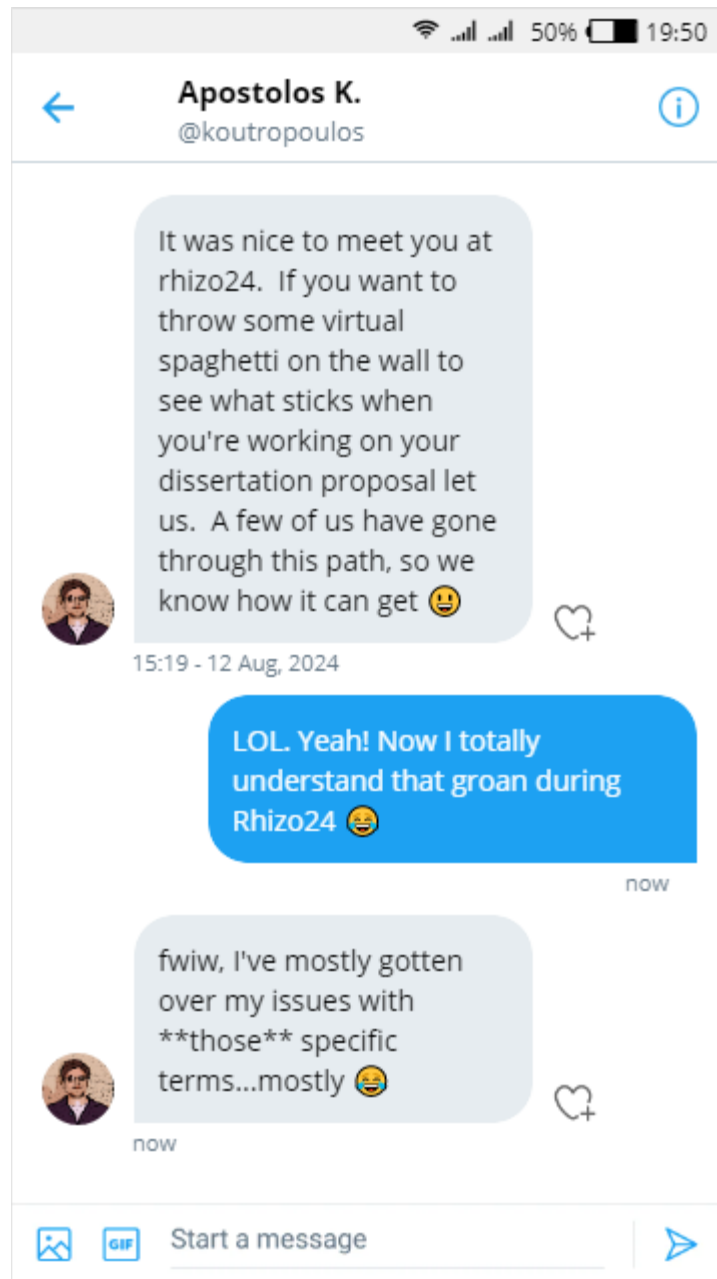[34] Logic bomb /ˈläjik ˌbäm/ - a set of instructions secretly incorporated into a program so that if a particular condition is satisfied they will be carried out, usually with harmful effects.

bbbzzztt   ***bbbzzztt***   ***bbbzzztt***

Her phone buzzed. A reply had come to her tweet. It was from AK.

Aliki opened up a direct message in her Twitter mobile app. This seemed like a specific research frustration to not share with the entire world. An opportunity to commiserate in private, and maybe get some tips on how to proceed if she decided to pursue this particular Scylla and Charybdis…

The conversation continued through Twitter…

Aliki: So,… by and large you're fine with both terms?

AK: I tend to just stick to *collaboration* as my *preferred* term because that's what most people use anyway. The distinction still bugs me from time to time. Well,… the terms I don't mind, but it bothers me when others dig their heels in and claim that their view is

the only *correct* view of how collaboration and cooperation are defined. But I guess we have to push back and provide evidence to the contrary because that's how science progresses, eh? 🙂

Aliki: Quite true. I am not sure it's the right time for that battle tho[35]. Maybe after graduation. How *did* you get over the hurdle? You obviously ended up using it, no?

AK: Well, it was a bumpy road. The dissonance that collaboration and cooperation can be used interchangeably was a little too much to come to terms with. At a conference that I attended in Boston once, I was advised that you can just go with what people expect to hear and once you graduate you can be an iconoclast 😐

Aliki: Is that what you did?

AK: 🙄 No! Of course not... LOL 😂- I misread the field. Really early on in one of my seminars (I think it was in a seminar…), I started off by pointing out the inherent disagreement that exists in the field. Well, it's not a disagreement, it's more of a *cacophony* of everyone saying their own thing. Anyway, I pointed that out and then I channeled James Paul Gee[36] and defined my own terms. In Applied Linguistics there is a "Big D" discourse and a "little d" discourse. The same is true for teaching culture, there is a "Capital C" version and a "little c" version[37].   This was stuff that I picked up in my master's degree.

AK: Sooooo…, I defined "Big C" collaboration as what was expected – as the research-based definition (mostly channeling Bruffee, and Johnson & Johnson) and "little c"

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[35] "Tho" – shortened form of "though" on social media
[36] Gee, J. P. (2015). Discourse, small d, big D. In K. Tracy, T. Sandel, & C. Ilie (Eds.), The International encyclopedia of language and social interaction (pp. 1–5). New York, NY: John Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi016
[37] Moran, P. R., & Lu, Z. (2001). Teaching culture: Perspectives in practice. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

collaboration as the way most people use it in the field – in other words, it conflates all sorts of working together situations and contexts.

Aliki: and that didn't work?

AK: yeah…no 🙁. I ended up axing all the Big/little-c stuff from the draft. It boggled the mind, really. Since as far back as 1999 people were defining their own operational terms for collab and coop[38]. Anywhoooo…this was an interesting challenge to overcome. Which was partly helped by changing methods 🙂

Aliki: What method did you use initially, before narrative inquiry?

AK: My preference *would have been* for collaborative autoethnography. It would have been much more representative of the collaborations I took part in, but that methodology poses a problem for contexts like a dissertation. Early on my plan, a former mentor at my institution hinted at mixed-method design; which *I knew* was not right for this case, but I went with it anyway because I had known them for years, so I thought they were steering me in the right direction. I knew narrative inquiry existed and it *seemed* appealing, but I was afraid it wouldn't fly. I was getting a vibe…and after the whole collab/coop thing I was thinking of playing it safe.

AK: Anyway… – eventually, I just kept it *as minimal as possible* with the description on collab vs. coop and moved on. This was done hand-in-hand with a change of research methods and that's when I switched to narrative inquiry… and lucked out on that front too 🍀 because in addition to being the *perfect* research methods for what I wanted to examine, it also discouraged a lot of a prior literature review so as to leave the field open to whatever direction the collaborative research took you. 💯🎉🎉🎉

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[38] Dillenbourg P. (1999) What do you mean by collaborative leraning?. In P. Dillenbourg (Ed) Collaborative-learning: Cognitive and Computational Approaches. (pp.1-19). Oxford: Elsevier

AK: I am really glad my dissertation advisors suggested that I look into this approach and were fine with a fully qualitative approach!

Aliki: Any recommendations about what to do about collaboration and cooperation?

AK: It depends. What are you interested in exploring? Do the words "collab" and "coop" matter? 🤔 Or are you just interested in the fact that people just worked together no matter what it was called? (this was my case). Terms *should* make things easier, but I just found that in my case these two terms just made things more difficult initially because of the way they are used 😑 *If the words don't matter,* I'd say test the waters with your dissertation committee to see what they think.   For me, personally, the whole collab vs coop was a red herring. This is what I ended up sharing on my blog and with my cohort mates shortly after I graduated 😂 - it gives you a sense of where the anxiety over definitions ended up at…

AK attached an image to the Twitter conversation…

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[39] This meme comes from the movie *Clue*, a 1985 black comedy mystery film based on the board game *Clue* (*Cluedo* in certain parts of the world). The film is a murder mystery known for the three alternative theatrical endings, and the phrase "communism was a red herring" is uttered before the real murderer of Mr. Boddy is revealed. Hence, this meme is often used to signify something that seemed important was actually a misdirection.

Aliki: LOL 🤣. Classic *Clue*. Communism was a red herring…and so is collaboration apparently 😄

AK: For what it's worth, after all this, I think that the strict dichotomy of collab and coop is *really outdated*. It was a good starting point to think about working together but I think we need to move to a *continuum of collaboration* – and forego coordination, collaboration, and cooperation distinctions. These attributes can be defined within the continuum.

AK: Collaboration can also be thought of as a framework that has several components, including trust, openness to exploration, diversity of membership, technological skills, and so on. I think a singular lens approach to examining collaboration really leaves a lot of important areas out of consideration. For example, some early research on remote work claimed that distance matters in remote collaborative work[40], but a big part seemed to me to *not* be distance but rather readiness to work remotely, and technological readiness was one of those "readiness" dimensions 🙁. It's important to be critical of the literature and tease things out.

AK: I think that the collaborations I examined, and the ones that I took part in (and also distance education more broadly), prove that it's not distance that matters but other things 😜. However, if you dig deep into their arguments, some things they identified, like technological readiness and collaboration readiness, are not related to *distance*. These things can fail in a local environment *as well* and produce – or contribute to – dysfunctional workgroups. This is *why* I think that a *framework approach* to collaboration has merit – and no, I haven't researched it 🤓

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[40] Olson, G. M., & Olson, J. S. (2000). Distance matters. Human–computer interaction, 15(2-3), 139-178.

Aliki: Fascinating. Maybe that's something to examine. I am interested in doing something rhizo-like, but I am not 100% sure yet. I got a number of ideas last month at Camp Rhizo but I need to just pick one to get something started for a paper for this seminar this fall. From your own research, what were some areas of further research, and did you pursue any of them?

AK: I had quite a few ideas that popped up and lots of them were on little *post-it* notes around my work area. In the end, I didn't pursue any of the further research ideas I had 🙂. Work and Life got a little in the way, but I also think that other ideas also became more interesting as I got back to collaborating with others. Let me look through my notes and email you tomorrow. If you're interested in Rhizo-stuff there is a lot out there. Gotta run – we're watching Star Trek on TV and the popcorn is ready.

Aliki: 🖖 I'll wait for an email.

Aliki quit the Twitter app and put her phone on silent. It was high time for some rest. A retreat from both things work-related and academic.

September 15, 2024

Another early start to the day for Aliki. She started searching Google Scholar for some early MOOC scholarship. There was something that piqued her interest about participant-researchers in those early MOOCs, and the empowerment that came from being able to talk about your own lived experiences. She rather enjoyed the compilation of MOOC stories that Veletsianos compiled[41] and wondered what other sorts of grassroots research existed.

***wind chime sound ***

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[41] Veletsianos, G. (2013). Learner Experiences with MOOCs and Open Online Learning. Hybrid Pedagogy. Retrieved from http://learnerexperiences.hybridpedagogy.com.

An email arrived. It was from AK.

> **To**: Aliki <alikiwonders@gmail.com>
> **From**: Apostolos Koutropoulos <ak@learningnomad.org>
> **Subject**: Areas of **future research** in Rhizo Collaborations
>
> Hey there!:-)
>
> Welcome again to the wonderful world of collaboration!
> Collaboration is great. No, really :-) Talking about
> collaboration can be…tricky! Anyway. I went through my
> notes, both personal notes from the time I was a
> participant in Rhizo14, Rhizo15, and Rhizo21, and also from
> some of the things that poked at me from my own
> dissertation research.
>
> One thing that jumped out at me was something called **sense
> of belonging** by Peacock & Cowan (2019). For learners this
> SoB is made up of two key attributes: (1) it involves
> feelings of being accepted, needed, and valued; and (2) it
> includes feelings of fitting in and being connected to a
> group, class, subject, institution, or all of these. I was
> wondering how this fits in with Rhizomatic learning
> environments that are (mostly) free from existing
> structures and learners are able to explore on their own.
> How do groups form? How do people get that SoB? and maybe
> what the role of **intentional hospitality** is within such a
> context?
>
> Another of my favorite terms is **cacophony**. It sounds ugly,
> but it can be quite interesting. I was thinking what an
> analysis of this *cacophony* of voices, this **plurivocality**,
> in the collaborative space means for actual learning. One
> pondering I had was whether or not this can be examined

through the lens of *critical digital pedagogy*[42] to explain (or describe) some of the collaborative work.

Also, maybe filed under cacophony, or bricolage, or *swarming* (what one of my collaborative groups did)[43] is how do people discover or develop their authorial voice in multiauthor or plurivocal collaborative works? I think this one needs a little more baking before it's ready, but I am convinced there is something to research there. I know some people from my own past collaborations who might be interested in this if you want to play around with this concept.

Another thing that jumped out at me from the literature is Rovai (2002). The gist is that trust, interaction, and spirit are three things that are important for communities to succeed. Spirit is cohesion and camaraderie – a community spirit. Social equity, social presence, group facilitation, group size as well as these three top things. I was wondering how these **spirits of cohesion** and camaraderie jive with the sense of *fun* in the MOOC and in the collaborations, and the sense of **HOMAGO**. I also never did come up with a satisfactory term for what others call *edutainment* in cMOOCs so that might even be a whole other topic to explore!

Oh, another thing – cMOOC as some sort of *incubator*. Some of the threads that have emerged over the years in private communication are that some of these grassroots research collaborations occur more in cMOOCs than xMOOCs. Saadatmand

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[42] Morris, S. M., & Stommel, J. (2018). An urgency of teachers: The work of critical digital pedagogy. Hybrid Pedagogy Inc.
[43] Hogue, R. J., Keefer, J. M., Bali, M., Hamon, K., Koutropoulos, A., Leunissen, R., & Singh, L. (2018). Pioneering Alternative Forms of Collaboration. Current Issues in Emerging eLearning, 4(1), 8.

(2017) in his research indicated that participation in cMOOCs requires learners to assume active roles in a spirit of openness that informs their learning experiences and networking activities, and requires them to develop digital competencies to manage the abundance of resources. This is also something that I had seen in the early MOOC literature (circa 2008-2012) on cMOOCs. So, how might these grassroots approaches connect with preexisting learner attitudes and skills? And how might these preexisting (or developed) attitudes encourage that grassroots, *just do it*, aspects of MOOC research?

Catalysts were also another big thing… Some researchers point to facilitation as an important part of collabs – e.g., Tseng et al. (2009) – but their research was in a classroom setting, so the facilitator was a teacher or some other authority figure...the kind that says "do this or you'll get an *F*". This is obviously not the case in a large MOOC. So, what is the role of *leaders* or *catalysts* (*or both*, if they are distinct!!!) in helping their teams in collaboration? Maybe keeping it simple and examining what constitutes catalytic actions in a group might help. In my research people knew that catalysts got groups unstuck, but we really didn't go into much detail about where things were getting stuck and how catalysts changed that. Maybe related to this you might be interested in examining/creating a taxonomy of roles for people who work in such collaboratives? This was another idea that emerged out of my explorations. There are already models out there (like Belbin's for business settings) so you could explore that path as well.

Going back to that ***cacophony*** for a minute – there was a multiplicity of communications channels. I would say both in the MOOCs themselves (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, G+, P2PU,

Google Hangouts, etc.), and in the collaborations (e.g.,
email, chat, direct messages, maybe even slack channels[44]
for some). Maybe tracing collaborations (or MOOC learning)
across channels and across media to discover *something*
about how we communicate in these environments. Maybe an
SNA[45] approach would be interesting. So, the idea would be
to get a sense of what the network looks like across the
course, examine clusters, and then see who and why people
cluster together with other people and in particular tools.
And, related to that, what do different tools or channels
of communication enable people to do (think techno-social
affordances). The density of information in different
spaces and where the linking points are across spaces could
yield some interesting findings. I also remember reading
Teaching Crowds by Dron and Anderson[46] while exploring MOOC
learning, and they talk about sets, nets, groups, and
collectives. This might be an interesting framework to keep
in mind as you explore connections between spaces and
individuals in social spaces.

Oh, yeah, one final thread: ***eventedness***. This term sticks
out to me with regard to the Rhizos. Some of our merry
band of researchers wrote something about it back in the
day, and Dave had a paper on it[47]. I'll look for citations
(I am sure I have them somewhere). My gut tells me that
there is something there that might connect with my
incubator/petri-dish concept, but you'd need another Rhizo-

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[44] Slack (https://slack.com/) is a web-based collaboration tool which includes features such as
persistent chat rooms (called *channels*) that are organized by topic, private groups, and direct
messaging between users of the slack community
[45] Social Network Analysis
[46] Dron, J., & Anderson, T. (2014). Teaching crowds: Learning and social media. Athabasca
University Press. Available at: https://www.aupress.ca/books/120235-teaching-crowds/
[47] Cormier, D. (2009). MUVE eventedness: An experience like any other. British Journal of
Educational Technology. 40(3), 543-546.

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style MOOC to test things out, or maybe access to another
affinity space.

Anyway, that's all that comes to mind.  I hope this is
helpful :-) I'm pretty sure it's enough stuff for 20
dissertations, so pick something that you find interesting
and fun, but also very (very! Very!) practical! The goal is
graduation!

Let me know if you have questions!

~AK
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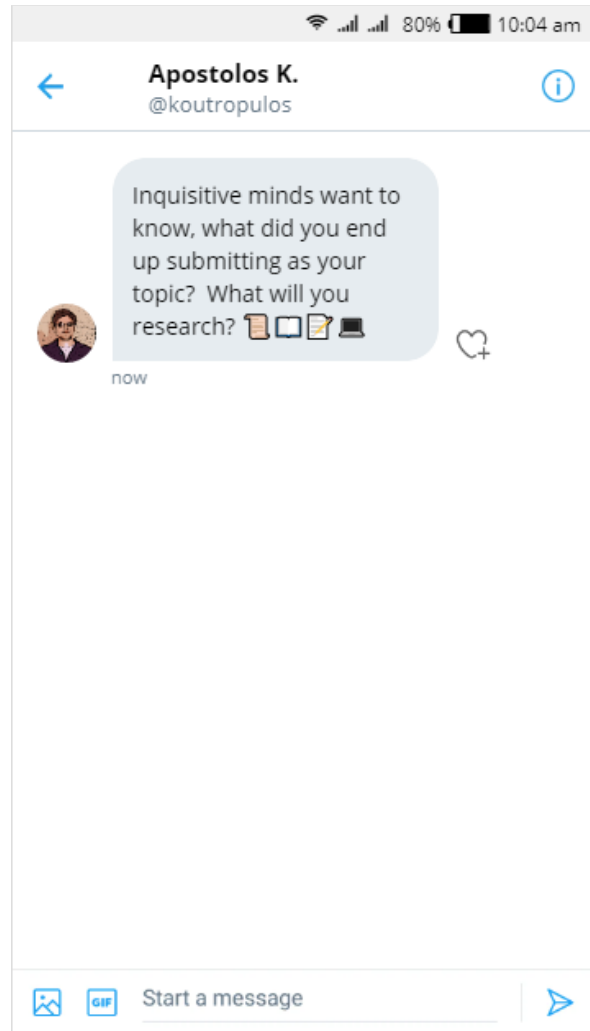
September 21, 2024

Another early Saturday morning working on a dissertation proposal. Aliki had just submitted her initial *proposal for the proposal* after yesterday evening's seminar presentations. The seminar leader had assigned an *elector pitch* for research proposals. Aliki had 5 minutes to present the grand idea to her colleagues – who were presumably familiar with some of the subject matter – and had 5 minutes for Q&A from the audience.

***harp chime ***

It was a Twitter direct message. She opens up the app on her phone. It was AK:

Aliki responded:

Aliki: Well, I was thinking of examining networks of power and influence in a connectivist MOOC…assuming that there is a connectivist MOOC runs anytime soon… 🤷‍♀️

AK: That's a really interesting topic. What are your thoughts about how to frame this?

Aliki: I was thinking about SNA initially. I can use TAGS[48] to start collecting Twitter chatter around specific MOOCs. If there's data on Facebook, I'll need to manually track posts and replies to posts, and cross-reference them with Twitter accounts, and then look at blogs postings, comments on blog posts, and cross-reference them with social media data to get a "complete" image of the networks across a course. That *cacophony* spoke to me. I need to do some more research on *critical digital pedagogy* because I think it might be an interesting lens through which to examine this social network analysis.

AK: Fantastic! Let me know if you need anything 🙂

Aliki: Well… I do have a question!

AK: yes?

Aliki: In your dissertation … Why did you/yoos/y'all collaborate? 🤔

AK: LOL. It's complicated, isn't it? 🙂

AK: There is a soundbite version though: Once people interacted in a given medium and got a sense of their surroundings, people collaborated (yes, collaborated, none of those other similar-sounding "c" words) because it was *fun*, they were working with people they enjoyed, and there was some sort of natural punctuation point (a deliverable).

There was a brief pause, and AK continued…

AK: I think fun + good company are good motivating factors as a start; and that punctuation point can serve as motivation to reach a subsequent interval or a graceful point for an exit. People can choose to adjourn (thinking of Tuckman and Jensen here)

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[48] TAGS is a free Google Spreadsheet tool that allows a user to automatically collect tweets based on search criteria. More information can be found here: https://tags.hawksey.info/

and step aside at that punctuation point, or they can remix group participation until the next punctuation point where a similar decision exists (adjourn or remix).

Aliki: Cool 😎 So… any advice for the dissertation process?

AK: Well…working on a dissertation is like...

AK: … like surviving a video game set in the zombie apocalypse 😜. You need to save often, and across multiple files, in case you need to backtrack to a previous save point. Your best weapon is probably a bat (your mind) because it will never run out of bullets. But a bat it's ineffective against a hoard of zombies (cognitive overload), so make sure to rest up, take breaks, and avoid the hoards (biting off more than you can chew).

AK: There are always dark dead-end alleys that some NPCs[49] will send you down. Those are scary, and your flashlight (motivation) will stop working at the worst possible time. Your best friends are the people who come over the radio and help you get unstuck (your academic advisors) at the moments you need them. And in the end, you have to be prepared for anything, and you don't want to waste precious resources on things that are trivial.

AK: …also, be careful of which side-quests you choose. Some side-quests advance the story or give you skills to ensure that you make it to the end of the game, but others are just *nice to know* (best case scenario), or just totally pointless. Be mindful of FOLSO[50]! Your goal is to finish the game (graduate), not *know all the things*. You have a whole

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[49] NPC is short of Non-Player Character. An NPC is any character in a game that is not controlled by a player. NPCs typically have a predetermined set of behaviors that can potentially impact gameplay. NPC behaviors can include aiding the player character, provide them with hints on how to solve difficult puzzles, or providing them with missions to undertake to further explore the lore of the game.

[50] FOLSO: Fear of leaving something out. I coined this term while working on this document because each article I consulted gave me additional leads to follow. Eventually I reached (digitally inaccessible) scholarship from the early 1960s. Pursuing additional literature at some point starts becoming counterproductive in the research endeavor, so we shouldn't fear leaving something out.

lifetime to get to know all the things. When you're done the ending is satisfactory (Yay! You're alive! Here's your diploma), but there are more zombies to work your way through as you start playing another game (engaging in future research).

AK: I've got a meme for that, I think from a conference presentation from a few years ago 🙂

⁵¹

Aliki wrapped up the chat with AK and decided to meditate a bit to clear her mind.

She wasn't particularly fond of these types of video games, they gave her the creeps and they were scary – but she guessed that this is why people found them thrilling, must be the adrenaline rush. Still, the point was clear: pace yourself, find allies, seek advice, and be strategic and intentional. The goal is to complete the game in one piece. Finding a cure for the zombie virus is another game altogether.

~~ The End ~~

To be continued…in some other research project.

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[51] The "all the things" meme is used to make a hyperbolic statement about performing an action. Sometimes this meme is known as "X all the Y" where *x* and *y* can be substituted for the specific items. An example of this is "learn all the eLearning tools" – something which is not all that useful, and might be counterproductive in the end.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

WHY DID WE COLLABORATE? A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE
EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS IN A DISTRIBUTED EDUCATIONAL
RESEARCHER WORKGROUP

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Principal Researcher: **Co-Supervisor:**
Apostolos Koutropoulos   Dr. Agnieszka Palalas
koutropoulos@gmail.com   agapalalas@athabascau.ca

                                                         Co-Supervisor:
                                                         Dr. Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin
                                                         cynthiablodgettau@gmail.com

        You are invited to participate in a research study about participants in *Rhizomatic Learning: The community is the curriculum*, a MOOC that took place in 2014 and 2015. The aim of this study is to examine research workgroups that formed during, and as a result of, participating in either – or both – of these MOOCs. I am conducting this study as a requirement to complete my Doctor of Education in Distance Education dissertation research.

        As a participant, you are asked to take part in this research in two ways:
1. Participate in a conversational interview, approximately 45-60 minutes in length. This conversational interview will take place in the months of August and September and will be scheduled at a time convenient to you. Some questions which will come up in the conversation will be emailed to you two weeks prior to the interview. The conversation will be conducted using Zoom and recorded for later transcription;
2. Participate in member-checking of transcripts and clarification via email in the month following the conversational interview.

        The questions and topics for the study will deal with your experiences working together with others, specifically about the collaborations that arose from the two Rhizomatic Learning courses. Participation will take a few weeks of your time. Approximately 45-60 minutes will be a conversational interview, and the remainder of the time is an approximate estimate for clarifying Q&A and member checking via email. Member-checking will be used to assess the accuracy of the transcribed conversations, disambiguate points that come up, and are a means for you to provide additional clarifying and expository information that you may wish to provide.

        The benefit of participating is, potentially, gaining a more in-depth understanding of your own participation in such collaborative groups. There are no foreseen risks of participating in this research. Involvement in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions or to share information that you are not comfortable

sharing. You may withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection period by contacting Apostolos Koutropoulos by email (a.koutropoulos@umb.edu) and stating your desire to withdraw from the study.

A transcript of the interview recordings will be provided to you to assure its accuracy. If you have additional comments, questions, clarifications, or a request to withdraw from the study, please provide them within one week (7 calendar days) from the time the transcript of the recordings is provided to you.

All data collected from this research, such as video or audio recordings, transcripts, will be kept securely on my office computer, which is both password protected, and in a room that requires a key to unlock. An additional copy will be kept on a portable hard drive at home, in a locked fireproof safe box, for backup purposes. Data collected for the purposes of this research will be stored for 5 years after the successful defense of my dissertation, and then deleted electronic or by document shredding.

Results of this study may be disseminated via a published written dissertation, an oral defense of the written dissertation, presentations at conferences, or through publication in academic, peer-reviewed, journals. A copy of the written dissertation may be obtained either through Athabasca University's Thesis and Dissertation Repository, or by indicating an interest in obtaining an electronic version through this consent form (see below).

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Apostolos Koutropoulos ("AK", a.koutropoulos@umb.edu) using the contact information above.

This study has been approved by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718 or by e-mail to rebsec@athabascau.ca. Information may also be obtained from my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Agnieszka Palalas, at agapalalas@athabascau.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project.

CONSENT:
I have read the Letter of Information regarding this research study, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I will keep a copy of this letter for my records.

My signature below confirms that:

- I understand the expectations and requirements of my participation in the research;
- I understand the provisions around confidentiality and anonymity;

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time prior to verification of transcript data (initial member check), with no negative consequences;
- I am aware that I may contact the researcher, Apostolos Koutropoulos, or the Office of Research Ethics if I have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research procedures.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

By initialing the statement(s) below,

_____   I am granting permission for the researcher to use a recording device to record our interviews.

_____   I acknowledge that the researcher may use specific quotations of mine, without identifying me

_____   I would like to receive a copy of the results of this research study by e-mail address:

_____

If you wish to be identified by a specific pseudonym, please provide it here:

_____

If you are willing to have the researcher contact you at a later time by e-mail for a brief conversation to confirm that I have accurately understood your comments in the interview, please indicate so below. You will not be contacted more than six months after your interview.

_____   Yes, I would be willing to be contacted.

Athabasca University

Appendix B: Ethics Approval

Athabasca University
RESEARCH CENTRE

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: 23992

Principal Investigator:
Mr. Apostolos Koutropoulos, Graduate Student
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences\Doctor of Education (EdD) in Distance Education

Supervisor:
Dr. Agnieszka Palalas (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin (Co-Supervisor)

Project Title:
Why Did We Collaborate? A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Individuals in a Distributed Educational Researcher Workgroup

Effective Date: July 13, 2020   **Expiry Date:** July 12, 2021

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid for a period of one year. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete (i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)) or the research is terminated.

Approved by: Date: July 13, 2020

Michael Lithgow, Chair
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
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