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Who Says Academics don't do CPD? Connecting Practitioners and Developing Together through Distributed Cross-Institutional Collaborative CPD in the Open

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author shares an emerging model to engage academics and other professionals who teach or support learning in Higher Education (HE) with continuing professional development (CPD). The model fosters informal cross-institutional collaboration through distributed and diverse communities of professionals for them to learn and develop with and from each other. A potpourri of pedagogical initiatives developed and offered as open educational practices and resources interwoven into each other using social media has been included. These illuminate opportunities for cross-institutional and cross-cultural CPD, highlight challenges as well as invite further exploration and research in this area.

Initial evidence indicates that open practices are changing the academic development landscape, and informal cross-institutional collaborations among HE Institutions and other partners can provide valuable opportunities for self-organised informal and formal academic CPD that strengthens relationships internally and externally and has an impact on practices and the student experience.

Keywords: Academic Development; open education; cross-institutional collaboration

Context

Teaching in Higher Education in the United Kingdom has been professionalised (Dearing Report, 1997; Browne Report, 2010), and almost every institution has their own teaching development programme in place, usually centrally located in an Academic Development Unit. This normally includes a teaching qualification mainly for new academics, often a related Masters qualification and increasingly access to an Educational Doctorate. In the last few years CPD schemes, linked to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and accredited by the Higher Education Academy for academics and other professionals who teach or support learning in HE, are being developed to gain professional recognition (Higher Education Academy [HEA], 2013b). These provide a valuable opportunity for new and more experienced colleagues to engage in academic CPD. More informal pathways are also available usually through timetabled face-to-face workshops and tailor-made provision, including coaching and mentoring for individuals and teams. Resources are also made available to colleagues via institutional sites and the virtual learning environment to encourage self-study and just-in-time development when needed.

Digital technologies present opportunities for new pedagogical approaches to academic CPD. Unfortunately, evidence shows that these are underused (Littlejohn, 2002; Oliver & Dempster, 2003; Donnelly, 2010; Bates & Sangra, 2011). This finding is, however, not unique to academic development and applies to the HE sector more widely (Armstrong & Franklin, 2008).

Bennett's (2012) research around the digital practitioner revealed that early adopters are keen to experiment and play with new technologies to enhance their practices and the student experience as a result. How can we engage more academics and what is the potential of open education to achieve this? The author's PgCert study (Nerantzi, 2011c) in the context of open academic development generated evidence that such practices are seen as valuable for academics as they enrich the experience and open-up opportunities for wider cross-institutional peer learning. Nerantzi & Beckingham's (2015a) more recent research shows that academics increasingly reach out and engage in open CPD to enhance their teaching practice and are interested in applying their learning to practice. This finding is also in line with Bennett (2012). Mainstreaming digital and more connected and open practices has started happening (Weller, 2014a, 2014b), and the potential presented by open international learning and development is recognised (Smyth, Vlachopoulos, Walker, & Wheeler, 2013). HEFCE (2011) and the European Commission (2013) urge Higher Education Institutions to open- and join-up in a more systematic way, collaborate more and share expertise and resources while bringing students and academics closer together, to enrich learning experiences, programmes and outcomes and offer provision that can be scaled-up.

Redecker et al. (2011) note that the future of education will be open, personalised and collaborative. From developments in the last few years, we have seen that the boundaries between formal and informal learning are fading (Conole, 2013). Open educational practices and social media are changing the way we live, work and learn. While the discussion around Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has generated increased interest around learning and teaching and related research activities, higher education institutions and other providers are seeking to develop sustainable business models to maximise benefits and find ways to not just use them as

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marketing tools to achieve global reach. Other open course creations, that are not MOOCs, often referred to as open educational practices and made available under a creative commons licence, still remain largely in the shadow. Weller (2011) talks about little OER as more dynamic and grass-roots innovations in contrast to big OER which are large-scale institutional projects, while Rennie and Reynolds (2014) distinguish between "bottom up" and "top down" OER. "Bottom up" OER could potentially start as little OER and if desired evolve into big OER. Zourou (2013) reminds us that innovations come in different sizes which are useful reminders for open experimenters and recognises value in such activities. What has been largely missing from MOOCs might be a scaffold to foster collaborative learning and support this. Too often there is the assumption that participants in MOOCs are self-regulated learners, will thrive in such open learning settings and create their own study groups. Research is confirming that this is far from the norm and more recent MOOCs design-in more collaborative approaches. Conole (2014) in her MOOC Taxonomy includes the continuum of collaboration among other features such as participation mode and the design. But how can we foster collaboration that is adjustable depending on scale?

Academic development has a key role to play in the professional development of academics and other professionals who teach or support learning in HE. After initial engagement in programmes such as a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice or equivalent or Professional Recognition by the HEA, staff are currently not required to carry out CPD linked to learning and teaching to develop their practice throughout their career, and evidence shows that engagement after initial development is indeed limited (TESEP, 2007). This has started changing in more recent years (Bennett, 2012), but much more needs to be done in this area. Mainka (2007) argues that the ongoing professional development is paramount to developing teaching practices and that integrated models work best. Important is also to support academics in this process (UCISA, 2012). The HEA introduced *Remaining in Good Standing* in 2013 (HEA, 2013a), and institutions are exploring ways to engage staff in meaningful activities. Could more flexible, practice-based, incentified, open CPD based on cross-institutional collaboration provide valuable and motivational engagement opportunities?

Megele (2014, p. 50) noted "Social media have transformed both the medium and the message and have changed our every notion ranging from communication and connectedness to relationships, friendships, knowledge and learning." Social and mobile media are used widely for informal learning, and their use in this context has been normalised by individuals. The explosion of informal learning opportunities afforded by new digital technologies and open practices disrupts institutional practices and creates opportunities and the need for new learning and development models (Nerantzi & Beckingham, 2014). Are universities currently using social and mobile media effectively to maximise engagement in academic CPD?

In recent years, resources and funding for learning and teaching have been reduced in the UK; while the need to enhance quality of teaching remains paramount, institutions need to be creative and resourceful and turn challenges into opportunities through experimentation and innovation. Gibbs (2012, p. 11) suggests that "there is a need for a national initiative on cost-effective teaching so that, where reduced resources force changes to teaching practices, it might be possible to maintain or even to improve student learning". Rennie & Reynolds (2014) also recognise the benefits of shared educational offers – not exclusively to save costs, share expertise and labour and raise quality but also to enable a more decentralised co-development of provision which could potentially lead to a more inclusive approach and collective growth. Gunn (2011) talks about barriers in engaging staff in CPD around technology-enhanced learning and highlights that decentralised supportive approaches that create shared ownership as well as incentives for engagement and experimentation together with evidence that these approaches work can help change the CPD landscape. The UCISA (2012) survey showed that the main barriers for technology-enhanced learning adaptation are time and money. Could informal cross-institutional collaboration in the area of academic CPD be a sustainable way forward through which resources and expertise are shared and developed collaboratively? Could such an approach create extended and vibrant professional development communities that actively experiment, develop and model new models of learning, development and teaching that can spread beyond academic development and transform practices in the digital age?

What follows are four examples of informal grass-roots ("little OER", Weller, 2011; "bottom-up OER", Rennie & Reynolds, 2014) cross-institutional academic CPD initiatives, developed, organised and maintained collaboratively with colleagues from different institutions in the UK and elsewhere without seed funding that foster collaborative pedagogies. Through these, the author illuminates the opportunities for collaboration and innovation that create versatile development opportunities of teaching practices and scholarly activities that have the potential to lead to further discoveries and innovation.

Case studies

1. Flexible, Distance and Online Learning (FDOL)

FDOL was created based on an MSc project (Nerantzi, 2011a; Nerantzi, 2011c; Nerantzi, 2012), a 30-credit postgraduate optional module for a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice at a UK higher education institution, approved in 2011. It became an open cross-institutional course in 2013 using freely-available social media in collaboration with colleagues from Sweden.

FDOL was offered three times in total from 2013 to 2014 and attracted participants from both institutions and from further afield. FDOL provided a formal and informal CPD opportunity for practitioners who were interested in learning more about flexible, distance and online learning through experiencing it themselves. The pedagogical approach used was based on Problem-Based Learning (PBL). A simplified PBL model dubbed FISh (Nerantzi & Uhlin, 2012; Nerantzi, 2014; Nerantzi, 2015) was used for collective inquiry (see Figure 1).

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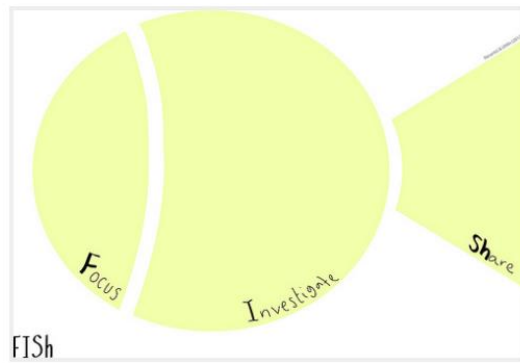

Figure 1 FISh (Focus – Investigate – Share), Nerantzi & Uhlin (2012)

The collaborative learning model changed from groups that enabled peripheral and core participation (in FDOL131) to groups of core participation (FDOL132, FDOL141). In Figure 2, the two initial modes of group participation are marked with different coloured dots on the left-hand side, while on the right-hand side, the layer of peripheral participation has been removed. Group size remained around 8–10 participants per group. The duration of the course was reduced from 12 weeks to six. These changes were made based on the evaluation of the pilot FDOL131 (Nerantzi, 2014). However, from the outset and during all FDOL iterations (FDOL131, FDOL132, FDOL141), participants had the choice to learn autonomously or in groups and all were supported by volunteer facilitators, represented with smileys in Figure 2.
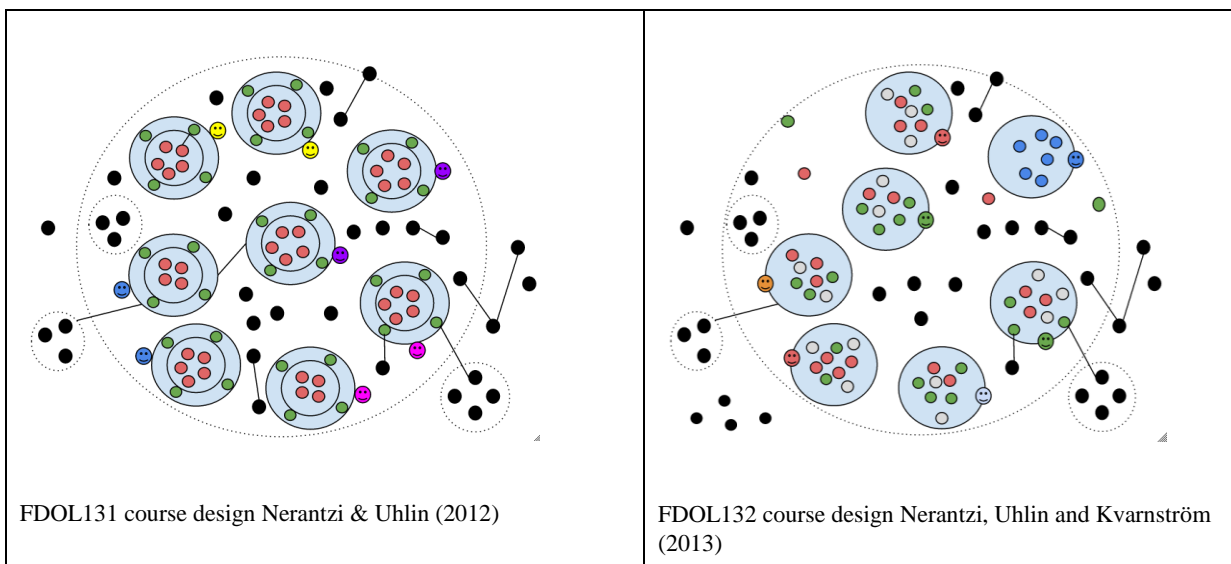

FDOL131 course design Nerantzi & Uhlin (2012)

FDOL132 course design Nerantzi, Uhlin and Kvarnström (2013)

Figure 2 Collaborative Open Online Learning (COOL); participants are represented using dots and facilitators using smileys

The collaboration between course developers was informal, all communication and coordination was done via social media channels, while assessment was dealt with at institutional level and therefore provided flexibility. Institutions could define and implement their own assessment strategy. A certificate of completion was issued by course designers to participants who completed the whole course.

Evidence based on a phenomenographic study (Nerantzi, 2015) shows that working in groups and being supported by a facilitator were strong motivators for participants as it made the experience personal and increased their commitment. Some of the challenges experienced were PBL as the exclusive pedagogical model for group work was seen as restrictive by some. Also, the focus on output rather than process created challenges for collaborative learning within the groups. Participants working towards credits enjoyed working with other open learners, and no tensions were noted. Participants found the cross-disciplinary and especially the cross-cultural experience valuable (Nerantzi, 2015) as it enabled them to broaden their professional horizons and connect with colleagues from other disciplines and countries. Participants felt that they were learning while on the course, could reflect on practice and introduce changes. After offering it three times, it was decided to make FDOL available as a standalone open educational resource for others to re-use and re-purpose.

Preparations are under way to develop a new open collaborative offer based on FDOL called Flexible, Open and Social Learning (FOSL).

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2. Bring Your Own Device for Learning (BYOD4L)

BYOD4L was developed in 2013, collaboratively using freely available social media, by two academic developers at HEIs in the UK, as an informal open learning event for educators and students in HE. The intention was to develop a better understanding of how smart devices could be used in an integrated way for learning and teaching. BYOD4L operates on smart devices and can also be accessed via laptop or desktop computers. As BYOD4L was a course that sat outside academic quality assurance processes in place at Higher Education Institutions, the development team invited an experienced researcher to peer review it. This is displayed on the BYOD4L site, together with the ethical commitment and related research outputs.

Emphasis was placed on pedagogies and how practices could be shaped to create versatile, stimulating and inclusive learning experiences for students using their own devices. BYOD4L was offered twice in 2014 over five days. There were online and face-to-face local happenings during the week, and participants were supported by volunteer facilitators throughout the week, while facilitators also supported each other through a buddy system and an online facilitator community.

An inquiry-based pedagogical model adapted from FDOL and FISh (see above and below, Figure 3) were used for individual, group and collective inquiry. The design features developed and used enhanced flexibility and fostered collaborative learning as a more fluid and dynamic process, encouraging participants to form self-organised study groups and identify study partners. Facilitated small groups will be used in the January 2015 iteration. All participants are supported by facilitators as individuals make up the collective and every individual counts.
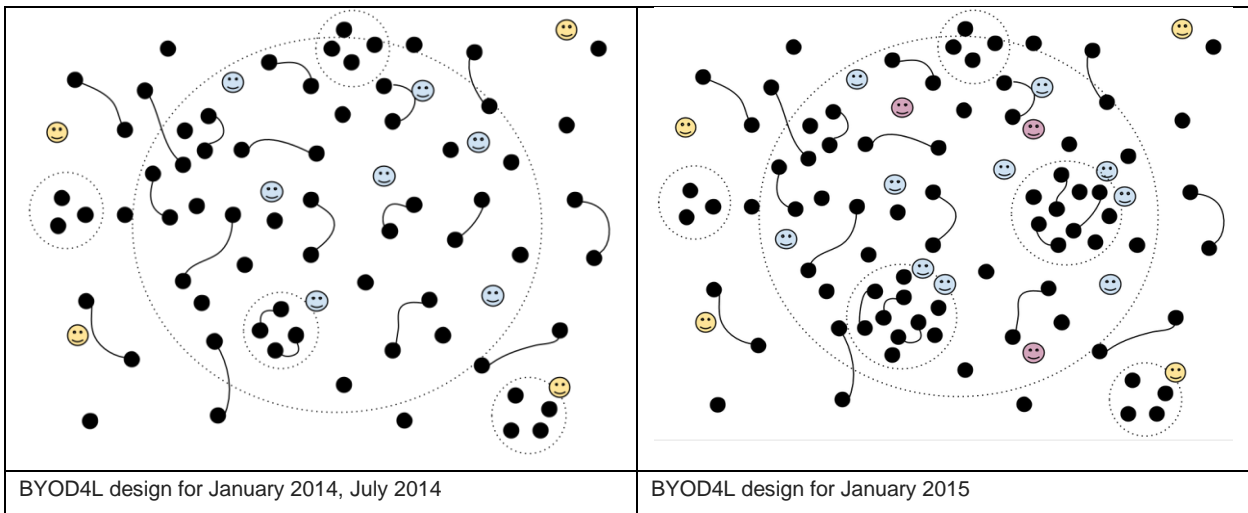

| BYOD4L design for January 2014, July 2014 | BYOD4L design for January 2015 |

Figure 3 BYOD4L designs for learning (Nerantzi & Beckingham, 2014)

Through the development of BYOD4L, the 5C Framework (connecting, communicating, curating, collaborating, creating) emerged. The 5C framework (Nerantzi & Beckingham, 2014; Nerantzi and Beckingham, 2015b) scaffolds engagement and moved participants progressively to more complex applications through an immersive experience in a supportive environment. However, participants are also able to engage with the 5C in a non-linear way (see Figure 4).
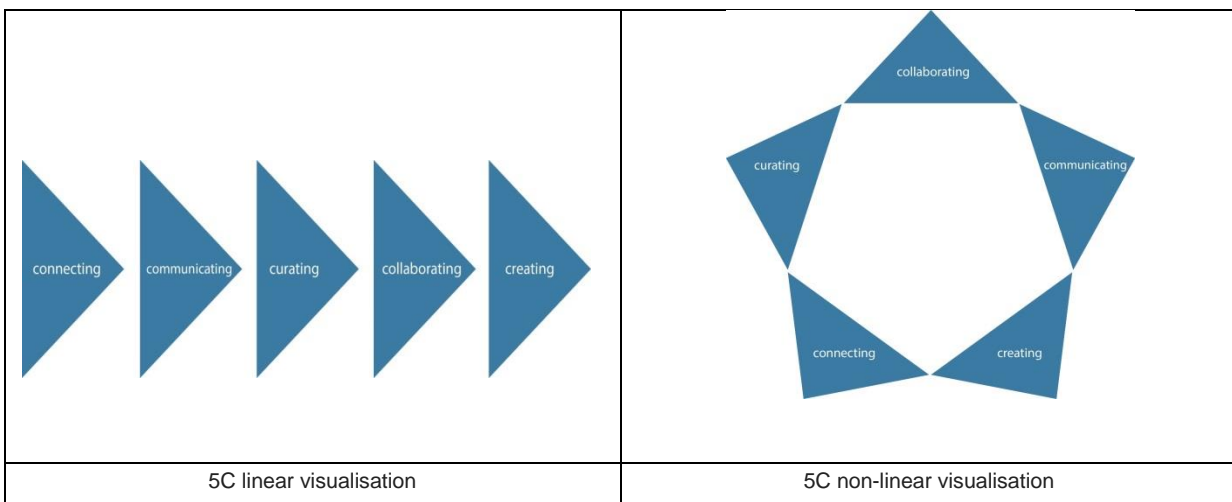

| 5C linear visualisation | 5C non-linear visualisation |

Figure 4 The 5C Framework

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Video stories that presented a student and teacher scenario were used as learning triggers for each theme. A set of generic outcomes and varied activities to engage students enabled maximum personalisation and authentic engagement as appropriate and relevant to each individual. Some resources were provided but BYOD4L was content-free or context-rich by design.

Engagement in each of the 5Cs could lead to an open badge after submission of evidence via a digital portfolio with peer reviewers from different institutions. Through the individual 'C' badges, bite-size informal learning and development was recognised and acted as a motivator. There were also badges for BYOD4L facilitators and course completion. In January 2015, a mentor badge was introduced as this role was introduced. Furthermore, there were opportunities for educators to use their engagement as CPD evidence for gaining professional recognition. In one participating institution, Manchester Metropolitan University, a pathway through a practice-based CPD unit called FLEX meant that they could study towards up to 30 academic credits at postgraduate level of the Postgraduate Certificate/MA in academic Practice, through their engagement in BYOD4L.

As BYOD4L attracted volunteer facilitators from many institutions, the developers' team wanted to explore if institutions, and not only colleagues from these institutions, were willing to join BYOD4L. The focus moved away from participation of the individual facilitator to participation and buy-in at institutional level. The BYOD4L designers explored and trialled possibilities of developing a model of open informal cross-institutional collaboration that could make scaling up and down possible and most importantly become a sustainable solution for BYOD4L, but potentially present an alternative approach for other open course designers who are interested in setting up cross-institutional collaborations.

The open CPD model proposed (Nerantzi & Beckingham, 2015a) for informal cross-institutional collaboration is based on the idea of starting small and scaling up or down depending on the demand, using a snowballing approach (see Figure 5) widely used in educational activities. The proposed informal character of the institutional collaboration creates institutional flexibility, adaptability to the local context and is based on mutual trust and academic integrity. In the proposed model, which grew out of practice, the collaborative open course design of the nature described above starts small and is based on individual collaborators from different institutions (Stage 1, BYOD4L January 2014). As relationships progressively mature, there is an opportunity for informal institutional collaboration and room for individual collaborators to join (Stage 2, BYOD4L July 2014). This stage was unstable and created over-facilitation which led the course designers to the development of Stage 3. There, institutional collaboration and up-scaling is organised and specific institutional requirements are introduced. Facilitators are all from participating institutions, and the role of the mentor is introduced for others who are willing to support participants (Stage 3, BYOD4L January 2015).
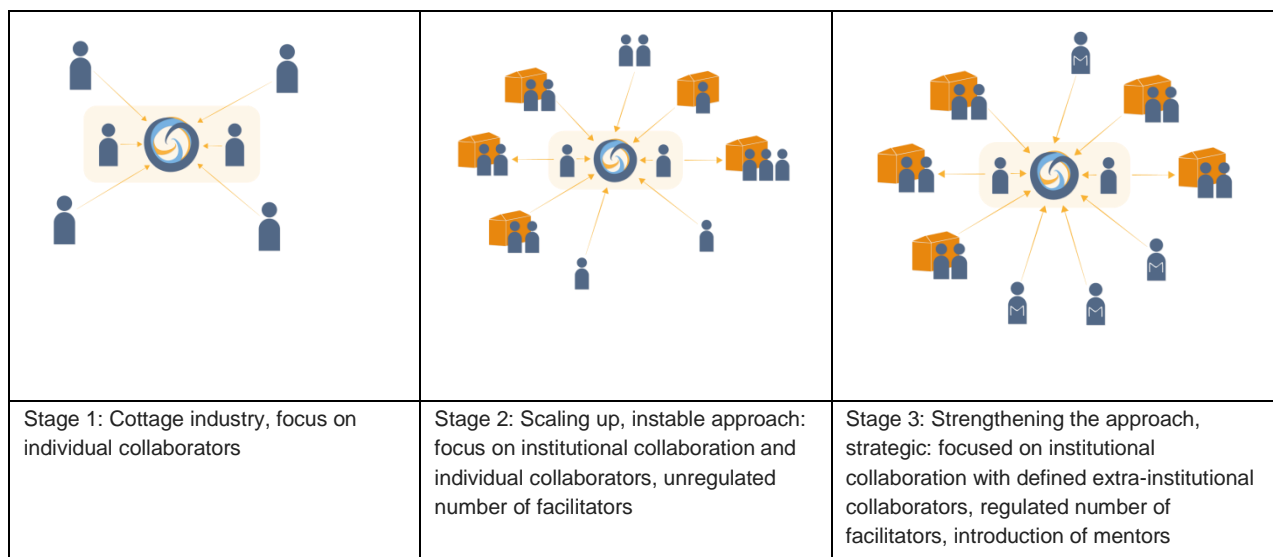

Stage 1: Cottage industry, focus on individual collaborators	Stage 2: Scaling up, instable approach: focus on institutional collaboration and individual collaborators, unregulated number of facilitators	Stage 3: Strengthening the approach, strategic: focused on institutional collaboration with defined extra-institutional collaborators, regulated number of facilitators, introduction of mentors

Figure 5 Developing a model towards informal cross-institutional collaboration using a snowballing approach

Evidence based on survey data, reflective accounts and messages in social networks which have been thematically analysed indicate that participants found this course valuable as it enables them to experiment and play with pedagogical ideas and experience learning using their smart devices, supported by facilitators before embarking on such practices with their own students. A strong sense of community was achieved as special attention was paid to nurture relationships and adopt a personal and supportive approach to facilitation, where everybody counts. A phenomenological study into the facilitator experience (Nerantzi, Middleton, & Beckingham, 2014) indicates that the BYOD4L facilitators enjoyed their role and saw themselves as co-learners (Smyth, 2009) and found their engagement valuable CPD. Despite the time constraints they experienced, they valued the facilitator community and support they gave each other.

3. Teaching and Learning Conversations (TLC)

The Teaching and Learning Conversations initiative started in 2011, as a need to find new ways to engage academics in CPD around learning and teaching, especially as workshops seem to attract a relative small number of colleagues and normally the 'usual suspects' (Nerantzi, 2011b). TLCs were initially a blended bite-size academic development initiative with face-to-face lunchtime sessions and webinars for and by academics with an institutional focus. However, colleagues external to the institution were also

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welcome to participate and lead sessions or webinars. TLCs were organised for an hour around lunchtime to enable busy academics to join. It included face-to-face monthly meetings as well as early evening webinars.

Learning and teaching in HE is discussed and debated and good practice is shared. From the outset the approach was open and inclusive. Resources generated through the TLCs are made available under a Creative Commons licence. The TLCs became a platform for different voices to be heard from within and beyond the institution, share innovations but also connect with like-minded colleagues from the wider community and support each other. Findings indicate that the TLCs were valued by the academic community and many academics and other professionals who teach or support learning volunteered to lead a session or webinar. This meant that CPD became multifaceted, proactive, self-driven and positive as emphasis was on sharing of good practice.

In early 2014, the TLCs became a series of open monthly webinars and evolved into a cross-institutional collaboration with five higher educational institutions led by Manchester Metropolitan University. The potential of the TLCs to become a cross-institutional collaboration was built into the initial action plan, based on the original evaluation as documented in Nerantzi (2011b). This new approach enabled the sharing of resources and the rapid programme development of a webinar series in the formal or informal CPD in the participating institutions but also more widely across the sector. Engagement is possible synchronously or asynchronously through the recordings as these are made available after each webinar under a Creative Commons licence and can be accessed from anywhere at any time. Some of the TLC recordings have been re-used on other academic development initiatives and integrated, for example, within thematic resources and development courses and therefore enable wider use and re-purposing. There are claims that OERs have limited update and in order to change this reality, Conole (2012), for example, proposes more integrated approaches. Through the TLCs we introduce a multiple-resource and re-purposing approach that strengthens and extends the life of an OER. As the cross-institutional initiative is reaching its first birthday, an evaluation is planned to identify what worked and how this initiative can be enhanced further to maximise engagement and value for the academic community.

4. Learning and Teaching in Higher Education chats (#LTHEchat)

The Learning and Teaching in Higher Education chat (LTHEchat), was born in 2014 out of the tweetchats linked to BYOD4L (mentioned earlier), which were popular, engaged participants successfully and created a real buzz. Evidence from the #BYOD4Lchat shows that it was seen as an effective way for dialogue and social learning (Reed & Nerantzi, 2014).

Palmer (2007, p. 148) states "We must spend more time talking to each other about teaching". Could tweetchats that sit outside of the borders of a specific event or course, present an opportunity for ongoing informal conversations in the context of professional development of teachers in higher education? Megele (2014) sees tweetchats as thematic *multilogues* that have depth, and could become a valuable activity for professional development interwoven into the fabric of informal learning, and calls for further research in this area to establish an evidence-based practice.

#LTHEchat is an informal collaboration among colleagues in four HEIs who form the steering group. Together they have developed and implemented the project using freely available social and mobile media platforms based on a Bring Your Own Device approach to enable open and widely distributed and mobile participation and engagement. The #LTHEchat project has a Twitter presence which is used as a main space for activities and also has an LTHEchat blog which is used for announcements, archive chats, voting, providing opportunities for feedback and commenting.

The first weekly #LTHEchat was offered in October 2014. To December, eight tweetchats were organised, which generated between 250 and 700 tweets per session. This translates on average into over 500 tweets per hour, about 10 tweets per minute (see Figure 7 for visualisation of example tweetchats). The #LTHEchat aim is to bring educators and students in HE together for one hour on a weekly basis on the micro blogging site Twitter to offer rich bite-size learning and development opportunities, to discuss and debate learning and teaching linked to specific topics that are of interest to its open community (Beckingham, Nerantzi, Reed, & Walker, 2015). Evening time in the UK was chosen for this speed CPD activity to enable wider and more informal engagement. Tweetchats are led by the #LTHEchat team in collaboration with the wider community. External to the project colleagues and students are invited to lead specific tweetchats to share their experiences, practices and connect through questions with others in an hour of synchronous exchange. An inquiry-based approach has been used to scaffold engagement in an open community. Coaching techniques are used by some members of the team to bring colleagues in and create additional opportunities for reflection and questioning. Freire (2011, p. 74) reminds us that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other." A set of questions linked to a specific theme are prepared in advance by the team and in collaboration with guests and then used during the tweetchat as appropriate. Douglas and Seely Brown (2011, p. 82) noted: "Every answer serves as a starting point, not an end point. It invites us to ask more and better questions" and this fits well with the ethos and intentions of the #LTHEchat team.

Furthermore, the wider community is encouraged to contribute their ideas for future topics via an online voting system used on the #LTHEchat blog. The conversations are curated afterwards using Storify, and a space to share personal reflections on each chat by community members has been created using an editable Google Drive presentation to extend engagement and reflection and also provide opportunities for asynchronous engagement with the LTHEchat for those who couldn't participate during the live chat.

First anecdotal evidence shows that a community is forming rapidly and that the synchronous and asynchronous strategies used to increase engagement and interaction are working and both seem to benefit participants (Figure 6).

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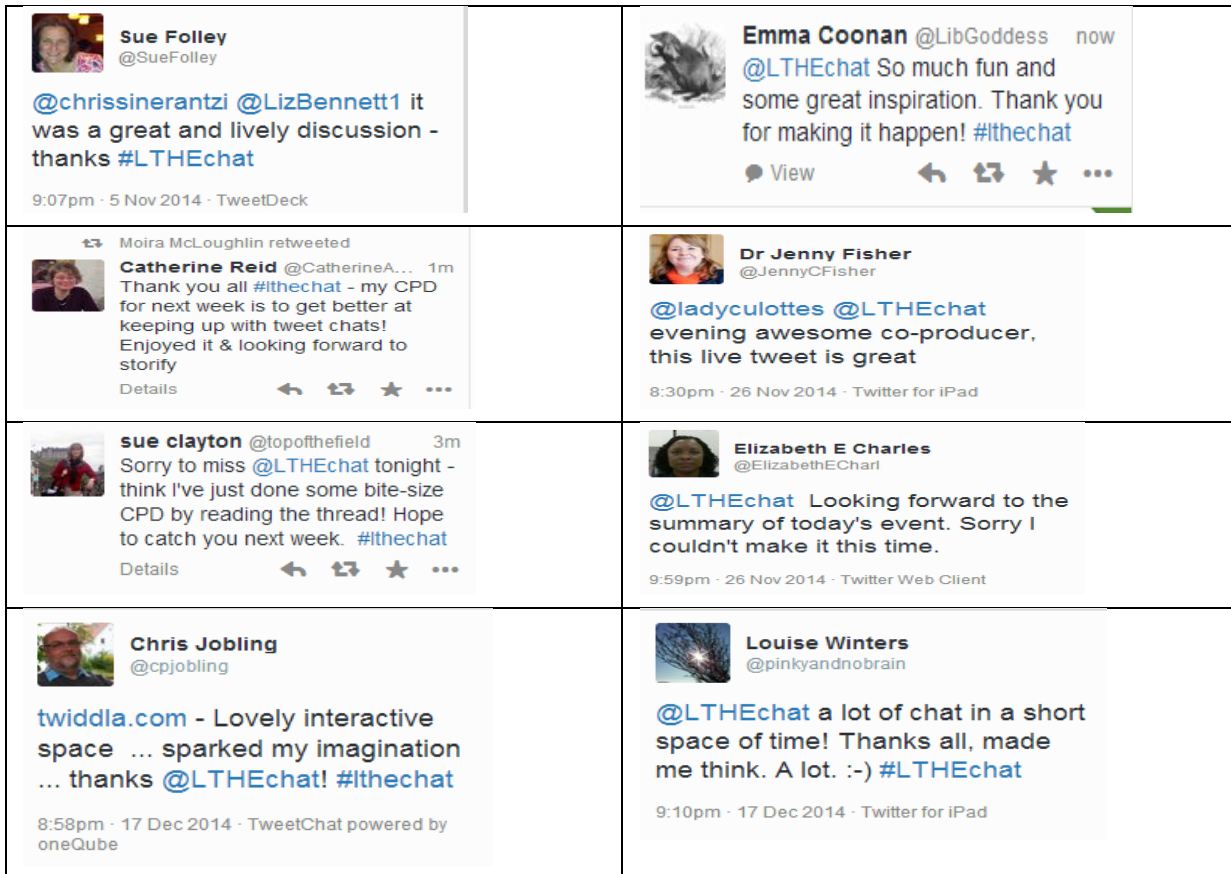

Figure 6 #LTHEchat voices

Many colleagues have started participating regularly as they see value in the tweetchats, and some have started putting themselves forward to become guest facilitators. Reciprocity as described in Weller (2011) is evident, and #LTHEchat participants feel part of a vibrant community of practitioners that exists and grows from within.
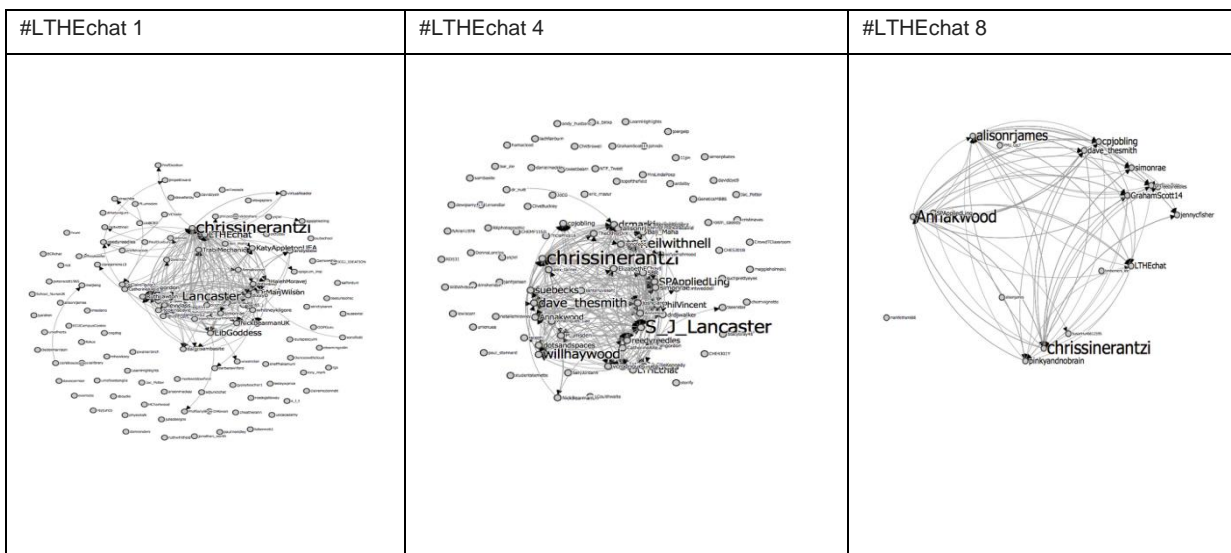

Figure 7 #LTHEchat data generated using Martin Hawksey's Twitter Archiving Google Spreadsheets (TAGS) Explorer tool (Hawksey, online)

Currently, research is being carried out by the #LTHEchat team to come to more precise conclusions based on evidence that will be useful to evaluate this initiative and enhance it so that it remains current and useful for the wider academic community.

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The examples presented here illustrate that open informal cross-institutional collaboration in the context of academic CPD can be used as an alternative strategy to engage academics and other professionals who teach or support learning in meaningful, flexible and self-organised development activities. These have the potential to change practices and the student experience through participation in open and distributed development communities with colleagues from their own and other institutions. They break the silence about teaching and present valuable opportunities to share practices, thoughts, ideas and pedagogical dilemmas as well as innovations and feel part of an extended support network of colleagues.

Towards more open and collaborative approaches for academic CPD

Investing in the development of academic development to transform practices is paramount (Bates & Sangra, 2011). However, it is proposed that new approaches, more collaborative and decentralised, should be explored to respond to a rapidly changing HE landscape and engage a larger proportion of academics in CPD at all stages in their career. Ongoing integrated and collaborative CPD is vital for renewal and innovation of practices (Mainka, 2007), while modelling such practices (Smyth, 2009; Donnelly, 2010; Nerantzi, Wilson, Munro, Lace-Costigan, & Currie, 2014) through academic development, active experimentation and research is equally important.

Valuable lessons have been learned through the development and implementation of the above described open initiatives since 2011 in collaboration with many colleagues from other institutions and countries in the area of academic CPD and related scholarly activities. Cross-institutional collaboration in the area of professional development of academics is an emerging area of interest. Academics and institutions have started seeing the opportunities that open, connected and collaborative development beyond institutional settings, provision and boundaries bring for the continuous professional development of their staff and the effect it has on their CPD offer, academics' engagement, motivation and individual and collective innovation. Evidence from the cases shared in this paper shows that engagement in such self-organised CPD is growing and that open informal collaborative provision among institutions and practices brings practitioners together in diverse communities and creates rich and flexible platforms for support, debate and discussion as well as sharing of ideas, experiences and practices around learning and teaching.

Creating pathways to incentivise, formalise informal development through open badges, academic credits and programmes, professional recognition and career progression, and appraisal processes is something that needs to be explored and investigated further in the context of academic CPD within and beyond institutions.

Cross-institutional co-development, collaborative implementation and facilitation as well as evaluation and research in open educational settings transform teaching, facilitation, learning and development but also assessment and peer review into a transparent and collegial process. This helps individuals and collectives to grow and might present effective, efficient and more sustainable and scalable solutions for the ongoing development of teaching and teachers in HE (HEFCE, 2011; European Commission, 2013). It should therefore be considered by institutions and academic development provisions in the UK and elsewhere, while further research into the effectiveness of such provision is needed.

Biography

Chrissi Nerantzi is a Principal Lecturer in Academic CPD at Manchester Metropolitan University. She developed and leads the FLEX CPD scheme, teaches on the Postgraduate Certificate and the MA in Academic Practice and supports individuals and teams at MMU to enhance teaching practices. Chrissi has participated and initiated open education initiatives using freely available social and mobile media with colleagues from other institutions and carries out research in this area with a special focus on collaboration in cross-institutional and cross-cultural settings.

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