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Resonating Frequencies of a Virtual Learning Community: An Ethnographic Case Study of Online Faculty Development at Columbia College Chicago

David S. Noffs
National Louis University

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by
David S. Noffs
B.M., Roosevelt University, 1983
M.P.H., Benedictine University, 1999

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Dedication

I wish to dedicate this work to the many unsung heroes of our academic institutions, those Instructional Technologists, Designers, and faculty trainers and support staff who work tirelessly to teach teachers how to become comfortable with technology, more self-reflective, questioning, and learn how to become lifelong learners themselves. Without these true heroes, the art of teaching might become merely a vocation where lectures and syllabi reign over the churning out of the next work force. Our work is nothing less than to make teachers dig deep and learn to inspire the spirits and dreams of their students so that they will change the world for the better.

Preface

One Friday afternoon in late December, 2007, I became ill while sitting at my desk. Pain darted up and down my arm and a slight pressure on my chest made me walk down to the nurse's station at Columbia College Chicago. A nurse took my blood pressure and suggested I go straight to the emergency room. I drove from Chicago to Elmhurst, and called my wife to tell her I was going to the hospital, but felt foolish and was positive it was something I ate. When I arrived at the Elmhurst Hospital emergency room, my blood pressure was 220 over 160. They immediately admitted me and scheduled an angiogram for the next day, a Saturday. The angiogram revealed three almost complete blockages and I was scheduled for open heart surgery on the next Monday morning. I had a triple bypass and, after a grueling recovery period in hospital, returned home for the Christmas holiday. We had the family over as usual for Christmas Eve, and I was grateful to be alive. I thought about my late father, about mortality. One week after the surgery, the chest and arm pain returned and, after taking two nitro pills to no avail, I called the ambulance. One of the grafts had occluded and another was partially blocked. My prognosis for full recovery faded. The whole sequence of events from the time I was first admitted to the hospital to that moment had been like a dream that I was sure would end happily. Now, suddenly, a cold fear gripped me as I lay in the hospital faced with the possibility of no improvement, labored breathing and constant fatigue, or worse. Thankfully, the doctors did not give up, and, after two more angiograms, a stent was placed to open one of the arteries and I have been able to slowly build back my endurance over the years.

I had never been concerned about my own health and had neglected taking care of my body. There was a certain disconnection I felt between my mind and my body. I suppose I felt sorry for myself at times and tended to take it out on my own body. During rehabilitation sessions after my surgery, I would talk with other heart patients and health workers and came to

realize that there was a meaning to my experience. Rather than continuing life disconnected from my inner feelings, I had been given a chance to reflect on who I was and whether I wanted to spend the rest of my life living the same destructive way. I had the ability to take control of my mind and body again, but needed the will to do so. As I looked for strength, it came not from religion nor medicine, but from my family, friends, colleagues and co-workers who offered support and continued my work in education while I convalesced. It reaffirmed my belief in the power and good of people when others are in need. I realized that I was not alone, and that others cared about my life. It made me think about my own health, diet, stress and habits in a new way. I have had to learn to live differently. I have seen my life from a different perspective. It has been transformative. As an educator, I am more patient, more caring, more reflective and more open to different viewpoints.

When I returned to Columbia I began to think about my practice differently. I had been hired as part of a Title III grant that had been awarded to the school three years earlier. The grant was intended to help the school increase retention rates through a variety of mechanisms, one of which was to improve the skills of teachers to use online Learning Management Systems (LMS') and connected/connecting technology. The LMS used at Columbia at the time I started as an Instructional Specialist, was part of an enterprise campus software package used at many similar and smaller institutions across the country. The LMS was widely regarded across our campus as short on features and long on bugs and instability. In particular, many features that instructors like myself wanted, such as RSS feeds, blogs, wikis, easy to use discussion forums and social networking "plugins" were lacking in the existing LMS.

In my role as Instructional Specialist on campus, I went in search of practical alternatives. After reviewing various software with the CIO, Director of the Center for Instructional Technology, the college webmaster and key faculty members, I decided to set up a small pilot program using Moodle. Moodle stands for Modular Object Oriented Dynamic

Learning Environment and is an open source LMS developed in my home country of Australia by a former educator, computer scientist and distance learning student himself, Martin Dougiamas. Dougiamas' story is, itself, a subject worthy of deeper study. His work has grown out of his own experiences as a remote learner in rural Australia and led to his unique software and business model. Moodle represented a new way of linking teachers, learners, activists, institutions and businesses in virtual learning communities interacting from anywhere, at anytime on the planet. While Moodle was not the only learning management system available, it was deployed as open source software that was dynamically improved and built-on by a community of educators, programmers, instructional designers, administrators and entrepreneurs… in short, a global community of Moodlers!

One of the strategies also developed as part of the Title III effort, was the recruitment of a group of key faculty members, many of whom were already leaders in online course development in their own departments. This group of faculty leaders were to become known as the Learning Management System Fellows (now called Moodle Fellows) and I was asked to coordinate the program. The program originally supported 10 faculty members with a $1000 stipend to run workshops and help train and support other faculty members in their departments. Since its inception in 2006, the program has steadily grown to include up to 15 members from various departments across the campus who conduct workshops, co-facilitate online courses in LMS development, and advocate for the increased effective use of Learning Management Systems across the campus. An offshoot of this fellowship was the Virtual Learning Community Fellowship program which also provides stipends to key faculty and staff members to build online learning communities to share content, discussion, and create knowledge together.

In late summer of 2011, I met to have coffee with a colleague of mine from the Title III grant team, Iaroslava Babenchuk. I knew that Slava, as friends called her, had recently

completed her doctoral dissertation at National Louis University, and we talked about the program at some length. Slava informed me that the program was a unique residential learning experience and that she thought I might benefit from it. Shortly thereafter, I applied to the program and was accepted to the Doc 9 cohort of the Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) Doctoral program in March 2012.

I have spent a good deal of my life in the field of adult education. First, being mentored for many years by my father, a well-known Methodist minister and community activist in Australia, then as a community based organizer for two decades and, over the last ten years as a teacher on the digital frontier of higher education. Since 2005 I have worked as an Instructional Technologist at Columbia College Chicago while also employed as an adjunct professor in the school of media arts. I have taught many online courses over the years and helped create the Virtual Learning Community Fellowship program at Columbia College Chicago, which I continue to coordinate. In 2012 I began my doctoral studies at National Louis University and decided to focus my dissertation, known in our program as a Critical Engagement Project (CEP), on my passion for the new “information ecology”, as George Siemens calls it, along with studying new and traditional learning theories in online learning communities. During one of our recent doctoral program workshops we were asked to create a metaphor for our research and I wrote the following poem,

The wind blows strong at times
And gently as a breeze
But with it comes refreshing scents
and sounds that carry of other worlds
The wind brings life
It carries seeds and insects
and brings clouds full of water

At times it brings destruction too

and violent change that shakes the world

and yet the wind brings

HOPE

Forever changing and shifting direction

From north to south and east to west

and every point on the compass

And when it stops we are becalmed

Until the wind returns

Chapter one: The research and the researcher

The problem

Despite growing activism in social networks and opportunities for educators to locate their practice in online learning environments, many remain reluctant to embrace virtual classrooms. Schools like Columbia College Chicago, are being pressured by economic realities to develop more hybrid and online course offerings as a means of reaching new student populations and increasing enrollment. According to a Columbia strategic planning document, opportunities to do this include, "…providing meaningful programs for adult learners, professionals, international students, transfer students, graduate students, and distance learners" (Provost's Council, 2014). However, administrators are reluctant or unable to provide additional resources for equipping faculty with the pedagogical and technological skills needed to support online course development, and specific guidelines for schools to train faculty how to teach online are often fragmented or local. Programs that demonstrate the ability to grow vibrant and connected online cultures can help guide future faculty development.

Qualitative research has shown motivation in online distance learning environments is often influenced by formal context e.g. teacher training (Hartnett, St. George, Dron, 2011) but more research needs to be done on how informal adult education takes place in virtual settings such as open learning forums, conference web sites, virtual faculty lounges and social media. There is a significant body of research on pedagogical practices in virtual learning environments, including a meta-analysis and review of online learning studies conducted by the U.S Department of Education (2010). However, the more recent growth of peer to peer teaching and learning, or peeragogy, as well as an increasing number of online adult education services, deserves the attention of adult education research. According to Bradley (2010), "The efficacy of

andragogical methods is unknown and often debated due to scarce empirical research on the topic" (p. ii).

Another developing field related to building a relevant and adaptive virtual learning community is connectivist learning theory. This theory is built on the principles of chaos, network, complexity and organization theory and asserts that learners in a digital era make decisions based on rapidly altering foundations and, as Siemens states, "The pipe is more important than the content within the pipe. Our ability to learn what we need for tomorrow is more important than what we know today" (2004).

While online learning is not a new phenomenon, there has been a substantial increase in the number of adult students enrolled in distance learning courses offered through public and private academic institutions, for-profit universities and vocational training companies. Research showed in 2010 that almost 30% of all college students were taking at least one online course (Allen and Seaman, 2010). Over a million students are now enrolled in massive open online courses (MOOCs) covering topics ranging from poetry to artificial intelligence ("The Year of the Mooc", 2012). While there is strong evidence that both educators and learners believe that online learning is as good or better than face to face learning (Allen and Seaman, 2010; U.S. DOE, 2010), a 2010 survey of 183 two and four year colleges conducted by the Campus Computing Project showed 73% of respondents agree that "faculty resistance to teaching online courses" impedes institutional efforts to expand online course offerings (Green, 2010). Highlighting the increased interest and support for online communities of adult educators, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education launched the "Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS)" for adult educators in September, 2012 (U.S. DOE, 2012).

Reflecting this national trend, resistance to teaching online at Columbia was significant among teachers who participated in a 2011 Survey of Faculty on Online Learning (Wode). The top five concerns among faculty when considering whether to teach an online course were:

1. Staff and/or training to help design a new online course or convert an existing course to online
2. 24-7 tech support for teacher and students while the course is being taught
3. Stipend for development and/or implementation of course
4. Course release for development and/or implementation of course
5. Recognition from top administrators at the college (p. 2)

The purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore professional faculty development in department facilitated online learning communities that were part of the Virtual Learning Community (VLC) program at Columbia College Chicago. The study was conducted within the frameworks of connectivist and transformative learning theories. It was my hope that this research would help inform faculty, administrators, instructional designers and adult educators how to better structure online learning environments as engaging sites for continual learning. I hoped to further the literature on connectivism, transformative learning theory and andragogy by demonstrating how these theories and concepts could be applied in practical ways.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do adult learners learn how to learn in virtual learning communities?
2. What role if any, does race, gender and culture play in the acquisition of knowledge in online learning communities?
3. How can online learning communities be nurtured and maintained to sustain and facilitate continual learning?

4. How do online learning communities help adult learners overcome fears and resistance to the acquisition of new skills in an information ecology?

The virtual learning community program

Established in 2011, The Virtual Learning Community (VLC) Fellowship program at Columbia College Chicago supports faculty led online communities in an arts-based institution historically resistant to online instruction. In some cases, stipends are offered to faculty to develop these virtual communities, but not always. All of these virtual communities are online (Moodle) sites made up of faculty members, departmental administrators and, in some cases, instructional technologists embedded as facilitators. The purpose of the VLC program is to provide instructors in departments and, often multi-section courses, access to course templates, materials, departmental resources and, most important, other faculty members like themselves. The VLC program members access most course teaching materials via Moodle web pages that act as repositories and sites of interaction. However, the online communities that comprise the VLC program operate outside of the “walled garden”, as Frances Bell (2011, p. 100) calls it, of the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS). VLC members communicate through asynchronous discussion forums or synchronous video chats and often contribute to the information hub by posting alternate web links, readings and suggestions for activities and assignments. All of the VLC program members included in this study interacted via Moodle, which is an open source LMS used at Columbia College in Chicago, the site of this study.

Significance

Emerging technologies and virtual learning can provide a strong environment for new ways of learning when successful models are used. While educational institutions often focus on technical training (vocational approaches) and structure online courses as a reflection of traditional face to face courses, vibrant virtual learning communities, in contrast, engage adults

in a dynamic transformative learning experience (Palloff and Pratt, 2007 p. 237). Specific models for these vibrant virtual learning communities are in demand and, as Frances Bell puts it, “Learners, teachers, managers, and policymakers are trying to integrate technology into learning in formal and informal settings, looking for theories that can inform their actions in useful ways” (2011, p. 100).

The application of connectivist learning principles in an adult education setting can help build on andragogical learning theories. For adult learners in an information ecology, the ability to make decisions about what to learn and what not to learn is a core skill. Learning how to navigate within and without multiple communities of practice while seeing the connections between fields, ideas and concepts can ensure adult learners have access to current and accurate knowledge (Siemens, 2004).

Faculties of the future must learn to both learn and teach online using a solid theoretical framework rather than trial and error, which is all too often the case. Confronting resistance and fear of online teaching and learning is a challenge that faculties, administrations, and institutions must face, but armed with new theories for a new digital age. It is hoped that lessons learned from this study may be applicable in a variety of adult education settings.

Educational theories that influenced this study

While I will elaborate further on theoretical frameworks used in this study in the next chapter, I want to briefly touch on them here as a way of putting this study in context for the reader early on. The nature of this research requires some examination of multiple learning theories including social constructivism, andragogy, complexity, chaos and networks. A theoretical framework that embraces many of these concepts is connectivism. This theory has been largely developed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes as a way of describing how information and knowledge is transferred across networks and connections in the information

age. According to Downes (2007), learning and knowledge *distribution* is directly related to, "… the ability to construct and traverse those networks" (p. 1). Siemens (2004) states that,

> In a knowledge economy, the flow of information is the equivalent of the oil pipe in an industrial economy. Creating, preserving, and utilizing information flow should be a key organizational activity. Knowledge flow can be likened to a river that meanders through the ecology of an organization. In certain areas, the river pools and in other areas it ebbs. The health of the learning ecology of the organization depends on effective nurturing of information flow (p. 3).

Networks, according to Siemens, are comprised of connections between nodes of individuals, groups, systems, fields, ideas, or communities. Connectivism starts with the individual, whose personal knowledge resides within a network, which then feeds into an organization, and ultimately provides learning back to the individual. "This cycle of knowledge development (personal to network to organization) allows learners to remain current in their field through the connections they have formed" (Siemens, 2004 p. 5).

A more established learning theory, transformative learning, acknowledges that our interaction with others in a learning context can result in us questioning frames of reference that we take for granted. And, similarly to connectivist learning theory, our worldview, learning and knowledge are dependent on a participatory engagement with others, and, in particular, with those whose frames of reference differ from our own. According to Jack Mezirow (2000),

> Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess

> reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight (p. 8).

In addition, there is extensive literature in the field of online community creation and facilitation that will be used as a part of this study. Much of this literature relates to online adult education and andragogical learning theory. Malcolm Knowles (1980) defines andragogy as "The art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43). Knowles andragogical assumptions, described in detail later in Chapter 2: Literature Review, will also help guide this research and its design.

Collaborative aspects of this study

There were two levels of collaboration for this study. First, the project team level consisted of two core faculty members (primary and secondary) and one outside faculty member. The outside faculty member was familiar with the subject matter and site of the study. In addition, I worked with expert advisors in the various academic departments who participated in the study. Some of these experts also participated in the online survey as part of this study, or were present during face to face workshops, online course planning meetings, or online Moodle camps and courses. I also worked with technical advisors from the IT department and the Center for Innovation in Teaching Excellence (CiTE) and other faculty and staff collaborators as needed.

Second, the Doc 9 cohort peers acted as mutually supportive collaborators who provided feedback and dialogue about online community dynamics and communication. During the three year program, fellow cohort members would raise questions, comment on drafts and provide feedback on conference proposals and research findings.

As mentioned above, the study involved collaboration with faculty and staff from academic departments at Columbia College Chicago who, in many cases shared with me a

desire to identify design models and effective strategies that had the potential to transform adult faculty learners in the VLC program. While this study was not a collaborative inquiry in the strict sense, there was an organic element inherent in the study itself; that is, a shared passion and commitment to the purpose of the study. One of the variables I included as part of this study was the organic nature of online learning communities and whether the ability to adapt and change as a community was a meaningful design element. According to MacDonald (2006), the organic nature of a learning community is based largely upon its constituency, and complex learning communities are radically heterogeneous in nature. MacDonald (2006) goes on to state, "... the multiple interactions of people, their environment (physical, virtual and social), technology and drivers lead to 'organic' development and 'emergence' of new properties, which are not possessed by the constituent individuals in isolation" (p. 2).

In an informal way, I also used the collaborative inquiry process with members of my doctoral cohort as part of this study at various times and in multiple settings. I found that working in a collaborative setting allowed me to locate my own practice and areas of interest when other collaborators shared their own perspective and experiences. These different perspectives have helped to pinpoint areas of shared interest and importance in our adult education practice.

It is hoped that the resulting qualitative data will provide significant insights into how adults learn how to learn in virtual learning communities. The role of the adult educator has changed in the new information ecology and we must be prepared to embrace new learning theories if we hope to make current and accurate knowledge accessible to adult learners. As the Indian educator Jiddu Krishnamurti (1971) says,

> Learning implies a mind that learns each time anew. So it is always fresh to learn. Bearing that in mind we are not concerned with the cultivation of memory, but rather to observe and see what actually takes place. We will try to be very alert,

> very attentive, so that what we have seen and what we have learned doesn't become a memory with which we look, and which is already a distortion. Look each time as though it were the first time! (p.121)

Personal philosophy of the researcher

In order for the reader to understand my approach to this research and the models used in representing my findings, I want to describe some of my personal philosophy and background as an adult educator. My undergraduate work was in Music composition and that musical background often determines how I view my self, my practice as an adult educator, my worldview and even my personal life. I strive for harmony in all of these things and believe theory and practice should always be in counterpoint. It feels instinctive to be constantly in the learner/teacher paradigm. I would describe this paradigm as putting theory into practice and evaluating the outcomes, reviewing the theory and always seeking out new theories. As often as possible I request and receive feedback from workshop and course participants that I use to modify future workshops when necessary. Because the nature of my practice, (usually technology and online learning) is rapidly changing, my theory and practice must be fluid and, at times, even improvisational. The field of technology and online learning in the digital age is dynamic. Practice changes well before theory can catch up and so relatively new theoretical frameworks such as connectivism and concepts such as andragogy continue to be debated, debunked and reborn even while practitioners use them as a foundation for the work they do. This is not a new phenomenon, as can be seen in the work of the progressive education movement and many of the theories associated with it.

The learner-centered approach continues to be revered and reviled by education theorists, yet it is practiced extensively, and can be very effective (at least from my first hand experience and feedback from participants) in current adult education practice. Over the past

five years, I have begun to practice a more learner-centered approach to teaching and have found it to be effective. In particular, teaching fully online courses to adult learners requires a delicate balance between delivering learner-driven content and facilitating in a humanistic goal driven way.

The new theoretical model of connectivism and the concept of complex learning communities, namely diversity of learning communities versus homogeneity, also drive much of my current research and practice. My work with virtual (online) learning communities requires a blend of multiple educational theories from the past and the present in order to define my practice. Ultimately, I hope my practice will inform the theory so that the counterpoint continues.

The sociocultural context of adult education

There exists a duality in how adult education is viewed in the globalization and information age of today. On the one hand, adult and continuing education in the traditional education setting is viewed as a vocational tool for the purpose of retraining members of the workforce with skills needed to land a new job or save existing ones. On the other hand, adult education is opening up new possibilities for collaboration, learning and activism via social networking and online learning. Adult learners can access free information via YouTube, Google, blog sites, and even MOOCs. Access to information in the digital age is the currency to be used if adult educators hope to develop Roger's (1969) fully functioning individual.

Much of the problem solving capacity of adult learners resides in the very technology that defines the digital age and in the capability of the Internet to connect individuals. As adult educators, it is important to facilitate as much as possible the learner's capacity to learn and to recognize their own potential for agency in connected virtual networks and communities Whether through the creation of a Facebook site, Meetup group, or Causes page, adult learners with Internet access can interact with society in ways never before possible. Hence, social

change that will help bridge the digital divide takes on greater meaning for adult educators in the digital age.

As stated previously, adult education does not take place exclusively in the digital domain, however, there is no data that suggests the importance of access to computers, the Internet, and online education resources will diminish in the near future. Over 85% of higher education institutions now offer some options for online learning ranging from online courses and training for certification, to complete online programs (Allen & Seaman, 2013). For adult learners without access to the necessary technology, these programs are not an option. Furthermore, the Internet offers an extensive library of informal adult education venues, ranging from YouTube how-to videos to professional tutorials. As the information age continues to evolve, technology and education appear poised for an unprecedented virtual symbiosis.

The roles of adult learners and adult educators

The roles of adult learners and adult educators should provide for a mutually beneficial interaction if meaningful learning is to occur. I share Malcolm Knowles' progressive view of the adult educator as "helper, guide, encourager, consultant, and resource, not that of the transmitter, disciplinarian, judge and authority" (1970, p.34). However, the educator needs to accept the role of guide more as a leadership role than merely pointing in the right direction and hoping the student finds their way.

In my practice, I often find the need to adapt to a variety of situations and find myself as a self-directed learner of new technology needed to guide my students. In some cases, I will actually switch roles with my students who are more comfortable in accessing certain technology tools or software.

Adult educators need to be comfortable with their own ability to release control of the classroom or learning situation, particularly in an online environment where there are no visual

or audio cues to guide either teacher or learner. In the information age and in the future, adult educators will need to develop the skills that Carl Rogers and the humanist theorists felt were needed to be an effective facilitator. Rogers (1969) felt that educators needed to respect and utilize the potentialities of their students and strive themselves to be self-actualized or fully functioning individuals.

Empowering adult learners

In my work with adult learners, I continue to work towards the broad goal of empowering learners to become self-directed and pursue their own objectives with newly acquired skills and knowledge. One example of this is the Fellowship program I help coordinate in the CiTE which is technology based. Small stipends are provided to faculty members to participate in training, and then develop and deploy their own use of online technology, training materials, or even online courses within individual departments. While I am a resource at first and conduct initial training, the faculty members go on to develop programs and materials we often end up re-purposing as new training materials for the next generation of Fellows.

Adult learners in adult education settings are often self-motivated and more open to new ways of knowing than younger students, although this should not always be assumed to be the case. While Malcolm Knowles' concept of andragogy has received much criticism from theorists including Elias (1979), Cross (1981) and Brookfield (1986), his six assumptions (described in Chapter 2: Literature Review) about the difference between adult and child learners provide some insight into the shift from child to adult learner.

I feel, as did Knowles himself in later works, that the difference between pedagogy and andragogy was, "probably most useful when seen not as dichotomous but rather as two ends of the spectrum, with a realistic assumption in a given situation falling in between the two

ends" (1980, p.43). Nevertheless, his work with adult learners has helped illuminate how I and others view adult learners in our classrooms and online virtual learning communities.

Sometimes adult education just happens

Adult education often takes place in an organization that has something else as its primary purpose. It often occurs when we are trying to accomplish something else together as adults. Sometimes, adult education just happens because we have a need to learn and teach different perspectives. Adult education is often messy and haphazard, poorly planned and even accidental, yet despite its shortcomings, it continues to thrive and adapt to the information age.

In my adult education practice, the faculty I work with often value professional development and training as a means to improve or maintain employment opportunities, but do not necessarily value the concept of adult or continuing education as a means to change social roles. This is in keeping with Knowles' (1980) 3rd assumption that "their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles" (p. 45), but is in discord with one of the primary objectives of progressive education, which is to advocate for social change. Yet often, the most predictable workshop on how to use an online grade book, for example, can turn into a powerful discussion between professional faculty on not only how they grade their students, but why assess things at all? They begin to ask questions like, who sets the standards, values, and ethics in their department and the entire school? They may even start to question how they view power relationships inside and outside of their own classrooms. Working with adult learners is rarely dull.

A time of change

My role as an adult educator is changing as rapidly as educational institutions and the technology that is now driving them. I often work with faculty, administrators and staff who continue to function as if budgetary decisions and organizational charts will make a difference,

but this is often somewhat of an illusion. Globalization, technology and the Internet have rendered much of the infrastructure of higher education obsolete. Administrators and faculty who have failed to keep up with the emergence of the information age continue to appear in workshops where we struggle together to find new meaning in their work and useful skills, lest they become obsolete themselves.

This stark reality of adapt or perish is nothing new to adult education, but the information age has created such a ferocious pace of change, that the new learning theory of connectivism may soon become the very cornerstone of how online adult educators build their practice. This is a major theme I hope to pursue in my theory and practice. I face my future as an adult educator like a musician playing a score while it is being written, turning the page with courage and anticipation.

Resonating frequencies

In keeping with my musical perspective on theory and practice in adult education, I have constructed a theoretical model of how the VLC program works, and doesn't work at Columbia. Needless to say, the resonating frequency (RF) model borrows from the science of physics and how sound is propagated in a medium such as water as longitudinal waves moving outward from the source of energy. In my model, the VLC program is made up of constituent online learning communities that consist of properties analogous to those of sound waves.

These waveforms are not merely for graphic effect, but represent the cyclical yet outward push of ideas, discussion, practice, knowledge creation, institutional transformation, and ultimately social and political change.

The duration or length of time a community remains active is represented by the wavelength or distance between the start and beginning of a new cycle along the x axis (see diagram 1 below):

Duration of active community = wavelength

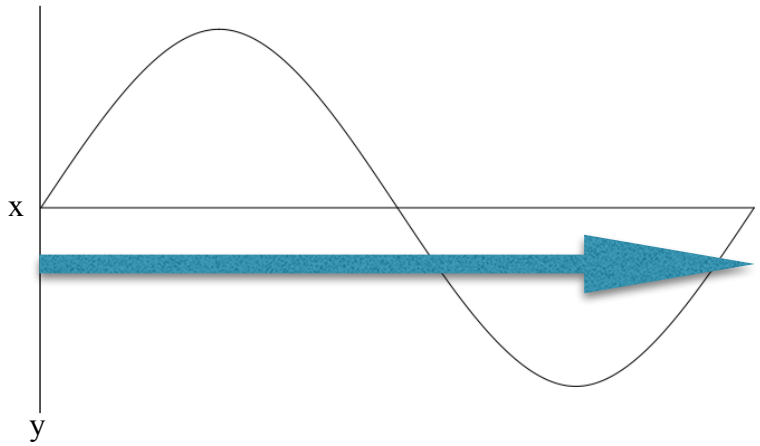


Diagram 1

The duration of online learning communities is not just how long they meet virtually, but also the length of time they impact, or *resonate* the surrounding environment. Much like plucking the string of a guitar, the string will not only vibrate, but resonate the hollow body of the guitar providing a lasting sound that may create external vibration, and resonance. In the case of large and long lasting waves, this may create an entire cultural wave of change, even beyond the walls of the campus into the community.

The amplitude or height of the wave, represented on the y axis in diagram 2 below, represents the amount of energy that is created by either the size of the college community involved or the ideas presented by those communities. Simply put, high energy communities that are active, collaborative, and vibrant, create a lot of noise. This loudness can be heard across the campus and by other departments and communities which, in turn, may react by trying to create a sound or voice of their own, either in harmony or dissonance.

Energy of community = amplitude

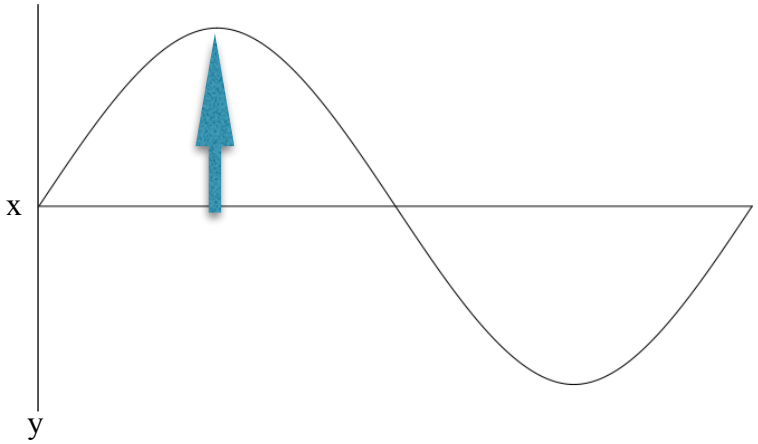


Diagram 2

The frequency represents the unique qualities of the online learning communities and the complexity or diversity of the group. The more diverse the community, the greater the frequency. Frequency is usually measured in cycles per second in the world of sound, but in the RF model, complex and diverse voices and groups are represented by an increase in frequency or number of cycles on the x axis (see diagram 3 below).

Diversity of community = frequency

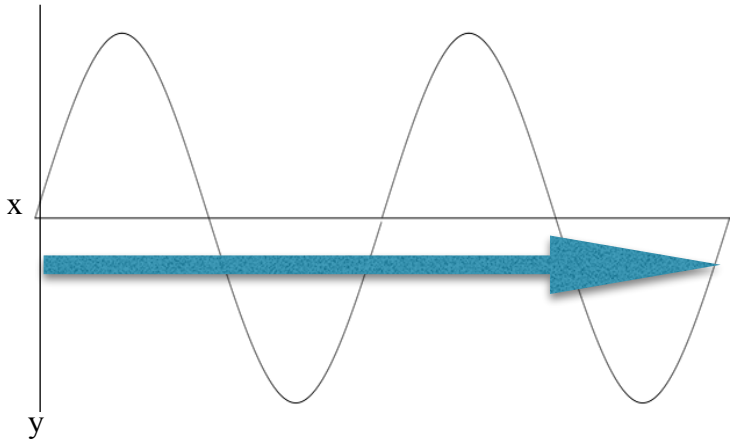


Diagram 3

In applying the RF model to my findings I have tried to apply an inductive approach rather than a deductive approach to how the data may fit the model. The wavelength, amplitude and frequency will vary considerably and are, rather than precise quantitative representations of my findings, qualitative reproductions of the very qualities online learning communities exhibit that make them resonate throughout the campus community and outward toward the urban community of Chicago. One example of this is the Photography department's online learning community for the Manifest Urban Arts Festival[1] that is held every year in Chicago's South Loop and in and around the Columbia campus. The Photography department's use of the LMS as a way to coordinate how students submit work to be displayed during Manifest is an example of something that is possible as a result of how the VLC program and LMS have evolved at Columbia. This online learning community impacts not only the Columbia community but the entire City of Chicago.

In the physical sound world, waves of varying amplitude and frequency will become one, as it were, when they are harmonically aligned as part of a naturally occurring system referred to as the *harmonic series* represented by a graphic image of a string after being plucked as it vibrates through the overtone series until coming to rest (see diagram 4 below). Note that the string first vibrates as the fundamental, then as 1/2 the length, 1/3 the length and so on, each time generating a unique frequency based on the momentary length of the string.

[1] See Terms and concepts used in this paper (Appendix i)

The harmonic series

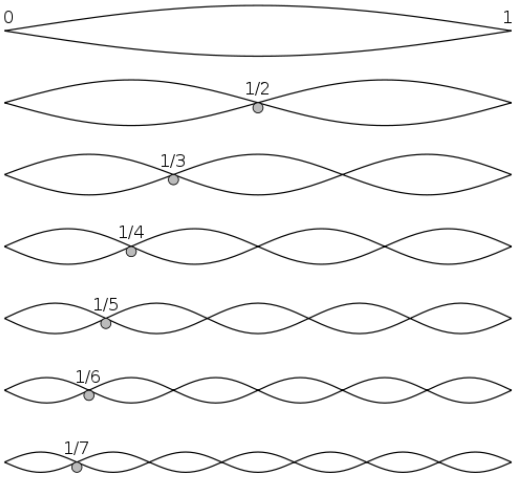


Diagram 4 (2014, Wikipedia)

In the RF model, the community quite literally *tunes* itself as complimentary overtones above the fundamental frequency, which, as will be described later, is the underlying history and culture of Columbia itself (Chapter three: The fundamental frequency). As will be seen later in my findings, there are a total of seven frequencies identified in this study including the fundamental. The six themes that emerged from my findings represent the six frequencies that resonate above the fundamental (overtones) to form outward moving *waves of transformation*.

I want to note that, while this model is theoretical and admittedly takes liberty with physical sound property realities, it serves well to describe in a graphical way the various themes and nodes of data that help form a rich picture of the VLC program. In addition, it is a refection of my own presence and participation, not only in the study, but Columbia and the evolution of this work as well. I cannot imagine that using traditional triangles, squares and arrows would serve conveying this story any better to the reader.

How the CEP is organized

I have tried to structure this paper in a way that best reflects how my research has evolved and the nature of the Critical Engagement Project (CEP). The CEP is framed around three main questions;

- Who am I? - Preface and Chapter one
- What are the commitments embedded in my current practice? - Chapter two - eight
- Who am I becoming? - Chapter nine

Beginning with **Chapter two: Body of literature** I give an overview of the literature that provides a foundation for much of my research. I follow in **Chapter three: The fundamental frequency**, with an establishing shot, in film parlance, of where this study takes place. It includes the history and culture of Columbia College Chicago as it pertains to the subject of this research, namely the use of technology, fellowship programs to encourage the use of emerging technologies and best practices in the use of online learning pedagogy, technology, and eventually the evolution of large scale online learning communities as part of the VLC program. I refer to this chapter as the fundamental frequency in the set of resonating frequencies that make up the VLC program.

Chapter four: Studying the case and culture contains the methodology used in the study including the case being studied, ethnographic nature of the research, and theoretical frameworks through which I view the research. Also included in this section is a description of the study participants, data collection and analysis methods and other topics related to the dependability, validity, reliability, transferability and ethics.

Chapter five: Perfect partials and striking resonance includes findings of three of the main themes that emerged during my research. I have grouped these together because I believe they create a set of the three first overtones in the frequency model.

- Resistance to technology
- Professional development
- Creating knowledge

Chapter six: Strange overtones of consonance and dissonance contains three additional themes that make up more of the set of frequencies that drive the use of technology and online learning communities through the VLC program. I have grouped these three together as they are more complex in nature and have to do more with diversity, community building, importance of self, differences and lack thereof in the VLC program. While there is still resonance, there is also dissonance, which also occurs in the natural world of sound waves. The findings in this chapter fall under the three categories of:

- Community building
- Giving voice to all
- Political and Social Change

Chapter seven: Conclusions includes a summary of the major findings and **Chapter eight:** provides me with an opportunity to make some **Recommendations**. **Chapter nine: Final reflections on my practice** allows me to address the Who am I Becoming part of this CEP. In Appendix i, there is also a section entitled **Terms and concepts used in this paper** to help provide some definition for concepts and terms used throughout the CEP.

Chapter two: Literature review

Research into online learning and specifically online adult learning has focused primarily on effective practices of online learning and theories relating to adult learning. There is also a significant body of research focused specifically on how adults learn online. In this review, however, I will introduce the relatively new areas of connectivism and social and professional networking where a growing body of research is informing new theories on how adult online learning and professional development takes place. As they relate to the purpose of this study, which is to explore professional faculty development in online learning communities, I will be reviewing literature on five topics.

- Connectivism
- Transformative learning theory
- Adult learning (andragogy)
- Online learning and use of technology
- Social networking and virtual learning communities

Connectivism

I begin with a review of connectivism as it is the theoretical framework used in this study. The term connectivism was coined by George Siemens in 2004 in his article, Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age. Stephen Downes states that, “At its heart, connectivism is the thesis that knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and therefore that learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse those networks” (2007, p.1).

Connectivism also takes into account the concept of institutional knowledge transference. In the case of faculty development, it is not just the storage and dissemination of content that matters, it is the transference of institutional standards, policies and procedures that

becomes a part of the information flowing through George Siemens' metaphorical pipeline. Echoing Siemens' (2004), quote on the *knowledge economy* from earlier in this paper, information is the commodity that is moved, traded, bought and sold, and organizations must make the management of that information a key organizational activity. He likens the flow of information to a river that meanders, pools, ebbs and flows. The very health of the organization depends on the "effective nurturing of the information flow" (p. 3).

Networks, according to Siemens, are comprised of connections between nodes of individuals, groups, systems, fields, ideas, or communities. Connectivism starts with the individual, whose personal knowledge resides within a network, which then feeds into an organization, and ultimately provides learning back to the individual. "This cycle of knowledge development (personal to network to organization) allows learners to remain current in their field through the connections they have formed" (Siemens, 2004 p. 5).

Siemens' eight principles of connectivism are:

- Learning and knowledge rest in diversity of opinions.
- 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.

These eight principles will be used to frame the context of this study.

Stephen Downes (2007) has also written extensively on connectivism and the theory of distributed knowledge. To Downes, individuals or members of a group connected through common causes or needs, form entities which, in turn, have their own unique properties and behaviors different from those of the individuals who make up the entity. There is a shared knowledge among the group or entity that is central to his theory of connective knowledge. Downes says, “The emergent properties of a distributed entity exist solely as a consequence of the organization of its parts, and not its membership, and specifically, from the fact that these parts are connected in a certain recognizable way” (p. 7).

Frances Bell (2011) argues that, while connectivism is based on strong philosophical foundations which grow out of Downes epistemological framework for distributed knowledge, it really makes more of a contribution to the field of technology-enabled learning as a phenomenon. He asserts that it lacks the rigor of research and theory required for it to stand as a theory of learning, let alone a replacement for traditional learning theories such as behaviorism, cognitivism and social constructivism. Bell sees connectivism evolving as two divergent strands, namely “connectivism”, espoused by Siemens as a new learning theory for the digital age, and “connective knowledge” as an epistemology articulated by Downes. However, while Bell is critical of recognizing connectivism as a stand-alone learning theory, he nevertheless sees the need for more qualitative research in relation to Siemens’ eight principles of connectivism. Bell (2011) says that, “Connectivism exists as an influential phenomenon that inspires teachers and learners to make changes in their practice but will not be built as a theory without significant qualitative studies to inform its development within the context of other theories” (p. 9).

Kop and Hill (2008), offer a vigorous critique of connectivism by examining the fundamental assertions made by Siemens and Downes and how prominent critics of connectivism, including Bill Kerr (2007) and Pløn Verhagen (2006) have challenged its

assumptions and assertions. They acknowledge, like Bell, that Downes has, "...elucidated an epistemological framework for distributed knowledge which provides a strong philosophical basis for the connectivist learning framework" (p. 5). Kop and Hill contend that, in our Internet connected environment, information acquisition will become increasingly learner-centered and that learners will also increasingly determine the content of learning and even who will participate in the process. They state that, as learning becomes more self-directed, the role of the tutor may disappear entirely as learners, "...find their own information, and create knowledge by engaging in networks away from the formal setting" (p. 7). However, while Kop and Hill acknowledge that a new epistemology may be emerging, they also contend that connectivism should not be "...treated as a separate learning theory in and of its own right" (p. 8) but rather as Kerr and Verhagen see it, as an emerging new pedagogy or curriculum.

While critics see no new theory of learning in the assumptions and principles of connectivism that don't already exist in accepted models of constructivism, social constructivism, embodied active cognition and community of practice, there appears to be a discernible difference in how learners acquire knowledge in a connectivist learning theory. Existing constructivist learning models view learning as mostly linear (horizontal structuring) or scaffolding (vertical structuring), but connectivists view learning as a largely non-linear or meta-cognitive evaluation of "...which elements in the network serve useful purposes and which elements need to be eliminated" (Siemens, 2006 p.1). In connectivism, learning communities are created when connections are made and (nodes of) networks are joined together. As Downes (2007) states,

> The point is: - there are no mental models per se (that is, no systematically constructed rule-based representational systems) and what there is (i.e., connectionist networks) is not built (like a model) it is grown (like a plant) (p.1).

Transformative learning theory

This study is also framed within the context of transformative learning theory. The emergence of transformative learning theory can be linked to Jürgen Habermas' (1984) theory on domains of learning. According to Habermas, these two major domains are *instrumental learning*, which involves the testing of facts which can be used to manipulate and control the environment, such as learning a specific skill, and *communicative learning* which involves how we interact with others as well as how we relate to feelings, intentions, values and norms. However, it was Jack Mezirow who developed much of the theory associated with transformative learning and who is best known as the architect of what has become part of the adult education lexicon. Mezirow (2000) points to a third domain suggested by Habermas, *emancipation*, as the actual transformation process that pertains to both instrumental and communicative learning. According to Mezirow, "The justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on the context - biographical, historical, cultural - in which they are embedded" (p. 3). As adults, we make meaning of new experiences by interpreting them within the context of previously held values, beliefs, and meanings. Transformative learning takes place when we include others in our meaning making, thereby becoming inclusive of alternative frames of reference, habits-of-mind and mind-sets.

In an adult education context, while instrumental learning can result in basic skill based competencies (dependent on the experience of others), only when communicative learning takes place will learners be able to act in an autonomous way through negotiating their own purposes, values, feelings and meanings (Mezirow, 2000). According to Mezirow, transformative learning can result in an adult education process where learners become more self-guided and self-reflective. The transformative learning process generally entails the following phases:

1. A disorienting dilemma

2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

Some scholars (Clark and Wilson, 1991; Collard and Law, 1989; Hart, 1990) have criticized Mezirow for not emphasizing societal factors that impede emancipatory adult education and ignoring social action as a major aspect of transformative learning theory. However, Mezirow (2000) states that,

> Transformation theory suggests that transformative learning inherently creates understandings for participatory democracy by developing capacities of critical reflection on taken-for-granted assumptions that support contested points of view and participation in discourse that reduces fractional threats to rights and pluralism, conflict, and the use of power, and foster autonomy, self-development, and self-governance - the values that rights and freedoms presumably are designed to protect (p. 28).

According to Newman (2012), however, we should abandon the term transformative learning altogether and simply use the term, *good learning*. Much of Newman's criticism about transformative learning is that, while proponents of the theory claim life-changing outcomes, there is little validity in people self-reporting that they have been changed dramatically. He states that,

> Patricia Cranton (2000) accepts that gathering "objective experimental or scientific evidence" is "a methodology inappropriate to understanding transformative learning" and argues for "a broader definition of empirical—that which is derived from observation and experience" (pp. 191-192). I take this to mean that, when push comes to shove, researchers must rely on getting learners and teachers to tell their stories.
>
> Stories can provide a window on to insight, but they contain invention as well as record. They are unreliable and that is their delight. As I said of my anecdote above, stories prove nothing. This leads me to wonder whether transformative learning only exists in the realm of theory. Perhaps it is a plaything of the mind, about which we can argue the toss, but which has little or no basis in everyday practice (p. 40).

Newman feels that the term has six major flaws which he outlines in detail in his 2012 article, but in summary, he feels, like other scholars, that the term has come to be a catchall phrase for what is essentially good educational practice. Newman proposes that the term transformative learning be done away with and replaced with the term *good* learning. He proposes there should be nine aspects to good learning which are, instrumental, communicative, affective, interpretive, essential, critical, political, passionate, and moral.

Viewing the VLC program, at least in part, through the lens of transformative learning provides a learner-centered perspective that can provide a more meaningful analysis of the experiences described by the research participants in this study. While I agree the term has been overused to describe a wide array of learning experiences, it is frequently used to self-describe career and even life changing events in a professional faculty development context. These events are sometimes referred to as “aha” moments, and for some may signify a simple understanding, logical connection, or pattern recognition. At other times, however, there may be more significant consequences that are indeed indicative of transformative learning processes that can and do lead to social and political change.

While the debate over transformative learning theory will continue, there is clearly universal recognition that effective adult education needs to bring about change, not only on a personal level, but in an emancipatory way that can lead to social change.

Adult learning (andragogy)

Much of the instructional design used in the VLC program and online learning communities at Columbia are based on Malcolm Knowles' (1980) six assumptions of how adults learn differently from non-adults. This has occurred largely through the heuristic practice established at the CiTE with faculty learners as well as a desire to emulate best practices developed in large online faculty training programs like those developed at Moodlerooms (2014) and online faculty training approaches advocated by theorists specializing in professional online development like Palloff and Pratt (2007). Because of the role that andragogical theory has played in the design of the VLC program at Columbia, it is important to include some discussion about the theory in a review of the literature pertinent to this study.

Though andragogy has its theoretical foundation in Eduard Lindeman's assumptions about adult learners (Bradley, 2010), Malcolm Knowles is best known as the educational theorist who popularized the term and developed it as a significant theory for how adults learn. According to Knowles (1980), adults learn differently from traditional non-adult learners and he used the term andragogy to describe the different practice of education with adults as opposed to pedagogy, or education with non-adults. Knowles defines andragogy as "The art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43). He originally summarized andragogy as being premised on four assumptions, later expanded to six.

1. Self-Concept: Adults believe they are responsible for their lives and they want to be treated as capable and self-directed. They need to be responsible for their decisions about their education including the planning and evaluation of their instruction.

2. Life Experiences: Adults come into an educational activity with different experiences than younger learners. They have differences in background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests, and goals. These unique experiences should be respected and taken into account when designing learning activities.
3. Readiness to Learn: Adults become ready to learn things they need to know and do in order to cope effectively with real-life situations. Adults want to learn what they can apply immediately to their work and/or personal lives.
4. Practical: Adults are task-centered/problem-centered in their orientation to learning. They want to learn what will help them perform tasks or deal with problems they confront in everyday situations and those presented in the context of application to real-life.
5. Goal Oriented: Adults want to know why they need to learn something before undertaking learning. Adult students become ready to learn when "they experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with real-life tasks or problems" (Knowles,1980 p 44).
6. Motivation: Adults are responsive to some external motivators (e.g., better job, higher salaries), but the most potent motivators are internal (e.g., desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem).

These six assumptions provide a theoretical foundation for the physical design of the online learning communities observed in this study. While there is still a great deal of discussion and debate over the theory of andragogy, nevertheless, many adult educators who subscribe to a more humanistic model of adult education, view these six principles in general as forming the basis of an effective adult learning environment. According to Elias and Merriam (2005),

> Thus Malcolm Knowles is indeed a humanistic adult educator. For him, the learning process involves the whole person, emotional, psychological, and intellectual. It is the mission of adult educators to assist adults in becoming self-actualized and mature adults. Andragogy is a methodology for bringing about these human ideals (p.134).

But andragogy has not been without its critics. Rachal (2002) acknowledges that while, “nearly all adult educators would be sympathetic to the view that as much of the spirit of andragogy as possible should infuse adult learning situations,” (p. 224) research shows mixed results in its effectiveness. Rachal suggested an alternative seven criteria for future andragogy researchers. He labeled them voluntary participation, adult status, collaboratively-determined objectives, performance-based assessment of achievement, measuring satisfaction, appropriate adult learning environment, and technical issues.

Brookfield (1986), also noting a lack of supporting evidence for andragogy’s effectiveness, cautions adult educators against erecting a “massive theoretical edifice” to the theory given the lack of empirical data to support it.

However, researchers continue to investigate the effectiveness of andragogical principles and assumptions. Joe Bernard Bradley (2010) conducted a study comparing the outcomes of staff members from nonprofit social service agencies learning grant writing in an andragogically-facilitated online learning module with those in a pedagogically-conducted online environment. The purpose of his study was to provide empirical data on the outcomes of the two methods in a non-formal online learning environment. Bradley found that a significantly higher number of participants in the andragogical module enjoyed the experience compared to the pedagogical module. In addition, a higher number reported that they were more likely to pursue educational opportunities in the field of grant writing as a result of their experience. The data supported Bradley’s finding that there were, “…higher overall learner satisfaction levels among participants in the andragogical module” (p. iv).

Online learning and use of technology

While online learning is not a new phenomenon, there has been a substantial increase in the number of adult students enrolled in distance learning courses offered through public and

private academic institutions, for-profit universities and vocational training companies. By 2010 almost 30% of college students were learning online (Allen and Seaman, 2010) and by 2012, more than a million students, many of them adult learners, were enrolled in MOOCs (The Year of the Mooc", 2012). While there is strong evidence that both educators and learners believe that online learning is as good or better than face to face learning (Allen and Seaman, 2010; U.S. DOE, 2010), a 2010 survey of 183 two and four year colleges conducted by the Campus Computing Project showed 73% of respondents agree that "faculty resistance to teaching online courses" impedes institutional efforts to expand online course offerings (Green, 2010). Highlighting the increased interest and support for online communities of adult educators, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education launched the "Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS)" for adult educators in September, 2012 (U.S. DOE, 2012). LINCS provides an online learning community of practice for educators seeking access to resources, self-paced online learning for adult education practitioners, and topic specific discussion forums.

Palloff and Pratt (2007) have written extensively on extending online learning for the purpose of faculty development, overcoming faculty resistance and fears of new technology, and extended communities of practice. They view online tools such as discussion forums, as sites of discourse not only between students and faculty, but between faculty themselves in non-formal peer to peer learning environments. They state,

> Finally, the learning community approach is proving to be an effective means by which to provide faculty development and training regarding online teaching. By putting cohorts of faculty into online training courses with the goal of building a faculty learning community, not only can faculty learn the techniques of building community that can be taken into the classroom, but they also develop their own support network and community that is likely to extend beyond the training period. Through this extended approach, we have seen

> faculty use one another as resources as they develop their online courses and invite their peers to review their work as they develop syllabi and activities for online delivery (p. 237).

While there is potential for online learning communities to be used more extensively as sites of faculty training (self-directed and otherwise) and sharing of resources, some researchers have cited a larger role, including the development of collaborative networks. These virtual communities may become sites where “shared creation” and “shared understanding” takes place (Ludwig-Hardman & Woolley, 2000). Lin et al. (2007) studied online learners' roles and identified two types of roles in online community behavior. *Inferior* group roles included information seekers or givers, encouragers, and followers, and *superior* group roles included initiators, orienteers, encouragers, recorders, gatekeepers, information seekers or givers, coordinators and clowns. In addition, in the area of knowledge creation, the inferior group usually provided ideas only, whereas the superior group, while also providing ideas, was more task-oriented, and concerned with integration. Yu-Chu Yeh (2010) identified four different types of online learning communities: active collaboration, passive collaboration, individualized participation, and indifference. Yeh’s research examined how the different roles of participants impacted the performance and success of the specific groups. According to Yeh, “… encouragers exist in both the inferior and superior group, the superior group consists of a greater variety of roles than the inferior group, and the superior group habitually cooperates while the inferior group does not. Accordingly, the relationships among online behaviors, online roles, and types of online learning communities are closely related” (p. 150).

Kathleen Cercone (2008) believes that it is important for instructors, instructional designers and professional staff to understand adult learning theory when designing online learning environments. For many faculty, online environments as places of teaching and learning are still new and require new teaching and learning skills. Cercone acknowledges that

adult learners are juggling increasingly busy schedules. While they are more likely to be motivated in their own education and professional development, nevertheless, she states that, “Adults are insecure in many decisions that they need to make. Life is complex due to career, family, and other personal choices” (p.139).

Cercone combines many prominent adult learning theories in her research and creates a compilation for the design of online learning programs for adult learners. This compilation includes some of Knowles’ theory of andragogy, but also takes into account experiential learning, self-directed learning theory and transformative learning theory. The following is a summary of her recommendations (NOTE: The author numbers these 3 through 13 in her original article, as items 1 and 2 would be the *biology of adults* and *learning styles* respectively, however, since she did not review those theories she did not include any recommendations for them):

3. Adults need to be actively involved in the learning process
4. Adults need scaffolding to be provided by the instructor. Scaffolding should promote self-reliance, and it should allow learners to perform activities they were unable to perform without this support.
5. Adults have a pre-exiting learning history and will need support to work in the new learner-centered paradigm.
6. Adults need the instructor acting as a facilitator.
7. Adults need consideration of their prior experience. The instructor should acknowledge this prior experience. Adults need to connect new knowledge to past events.
8. Adults need to see the link between what they are learning and how it will apply to their lives. They want to apply immediately their new knowledge. They are problem-centered.

9. Adults need to feel that learning focuses on issues that directly concern them and want to know what they are going to learn, how the learning will be conducted, and why it is important. The course should be learner-centered vs. teacher-centered.
10. Adults needs to test their learning as they go along, rather than receive background theory.
11. Adult learning requires a climate that is collaborative, respectful, mutual, and informal.
12. Adults need to self-reflect on the learning process and be given support for transformational learning.
13. Adults need dialogue and social interaction must be provided. They need to collaborate with other students (pp. 154-159).

Social networking and virtual learning communities

Virtual learning communities are almost as old as the personal computer and certainly can be traced back to the combination of personal computer and modem, which enabled personal computers to communicate with each other. Research into computer mediated communications (CMC) and some of the early virtual learning communities is eloquently narrated in the 1993 seminal work of Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. In this work, Rheingold describes what it was like for early technology pioneers to experience the exhilaration of interacting with likeminded individuals through the new medium of CMC and finding new friends, colleagues, soulmates and causes at the speed of light!

Rheingold recognized very early that people would be rightfully fearful and unprepared for this new way of communicating with others. He says,

> Many people are alarmed by the very idea of a virtual community, fearing that it is another step in the wrong direction, substituting more technological ersatz for yet

> another natural resource or human freedom. These critics often voice their sadness at what people have been reduced to doing in a civilization that worships technology, decrying the circumstances that lead some people into such pathetically disconnected lives that they prefer to find their companions on the other side of a computer screen. There is a seed of truth in this fear, for virtual communities require more than words on a screen at some point if they intend to be other than ersatz (p. 2).

However, Rheingold goes on to suggest that virtual communities filled a void already created as the emerging forces of technology broke down the old informal ways people interacted with each other. In a prophetic manner, he envisioned social networking with both its advantages and disadvantages.

> Perhaps cyberspace is one of the informal public places where people can rebuild the aspects of community that were lost when the malt shop became a mall. Or perhaps cyberspace is precisely the wrong place to look for the rebirth of community, offering not a tool for conviviality but a life-denying simulacrum of real passion and true commitment to one another. In either case, we need to find out soon (p. 2).

Rheingold did foresee many of the challenges facing virtual communities and CMC but continues to be an advocate for thoughtfully applied technology and writes and educates about online technology to this day.

Palloff and Pratt (2007) have also recognized the extent to which virtual communities can extend institutions into the communities beyond. In one dramatic example, circumstances led to a community college reinventing itself.

> The extended learning community concept has also been applied in troubled times. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in fall 2005, several academic institutions in the Gulf States were forced to use online means to connect with their students and to continue the mission of delivering education. For some, such as Delgado Community

> College in New Orleans, the significant destruction of their physical plant pushed them to reemerge as a predominantly online institution. An extended online learning community approach through the colleges main website has been used to reach both students and faculty who have been displaced all over the United States, allowing them to support one another through this difficult time and to continue delivering education (236-237).

As far as how online learning communities pertain specifically to adult learning, Ziegler, Paulus and Woodside (2014) see the need for more research into the specifics of how informal learning takes place in online learning communities, and, more specifically, asynchronous online discussion forums. While researchers like Lave and Wenger (1991) and Sawchuk (2008) have shown that learning takes place informally through online conversations, "…how group meaning making occurs in an online environment is less well documented" (Ziegler et al, p. 65). The authors identified four aspects of meaning making in online peer initiated or support group communities:

1. *Notice:* This is a focus on self; noticing one's own experience, talking about one's own experience in light of the other's; could be implicit or could occur in the subject line of a posted message
2. *Reinterpret:* This is a focus on the other, as in a response to the other's experience that has been shared; reinterpreting what another has said in the discussion or in the posted life histories
3. *Theorize:* This is a focus on one's own experience and/or a focus on the other's experience; creates an abstraction for what has been shared concretely
4. *Question assumptions:* This is questioning one's own or another assumptions (Ziegler et al, p. 66).

Martin Dougiamas, who wrote the original code for the Moodle Learning Management System, and Peter Taylor (2002) recognized the importance of having technology that was

based upon learning theory rather than computer science or programming algorithms alone. Dougiamas and Taylor describes the online pedagogy behind their work to create an open source learning management system as a natural progression based upon social constructivism and social constructionism. Through the perspectives of collaborative discourse and the individual development of meaning, "…learners are apprenticed into 'communities of practice'" (p. 3).

Built into the core code of the Moodle software is a framework to allow monitoring of the quality of discourse in a collaborative environment. Based upon the theory of women's ways of knowing developed from the field of gender research (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), Dougiamas and Taylor created a rating scale that highlights two distinct learning styles: *separate knowing* and *connected knowing*. "Connected knowers tend to learn cooperatively, and are more congenial and more willing to build on the ideas of others, while separate knowers tend to take a more critical and argumentative stance to learning" (p. 3).

Dougiamas and Taylor's writings and software design is also greatly influenced by Habermas' (1984) critical theory of communicative action and emancipatory knowledge. According the Dougiamas and Taylor,

> Thus, our pedagogical intention to enable teachers to develop the skills of transformative professionals capable of appreciating the need to complexify the culture of learning in their own educational institutions so that the interests and aspirations of all students are met. Interwoven into this is the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow 1991), which calls on educators to help the learner examine the assumptions that underlie their beliefs, feelings and actions, then assess the consequences of these assumptions, explore alternatives and test their validity through effective participation in reflective dialogue (2002, p. 4.).

Reinforcing the need to apply technology for collaborative and transformative learning in faculty development, Palloff and Pratt (2007) state that, “Too often, faculty training involves an introduction to the hardware and software being used to deliver classes, with no emphasis on process…Once again, the technology should only be used as a vehicle to convey the ability to create a collaborative, transformative process. It is only the means by which instructors and students can connect to form community” (p. 237).

Summary

In summary, I reviewed five general topics in my review of literature. The first was *connectivism*, which is one of the theoretical frameworks used in this study. While proponents like Siemens (2004) and Downes (2007) have argued that the theory is necessary to understand how information is aggregated and accessed in connected communities and networks, others, like Bell (2011) see it as a technology learning related phenomenon. Still others, like Kop and Hill (2008), argue that connectivism should be seen more as a new pedagogy or curriculum.

The second topic was *transformative learning*, also used as a theoretical framework for this study. Originally attributed to Jurgen Habermas, transformative learning really becomes associated with the work of Jack Mezirow, who developed the theory as a foundation of adult education where learners become more self-guided and self-reflective. Some critics, like Clark and Wilson, (1991) and Collard and Law, (1989) as well as Hart, (1990) have noted a lack of emphasis on societal factors that impede emancipatory adult education. In addition, Newman, (2012) has criticized transformative learning theory as being a catch all for simply *good learning* practices.

The third topic was *andragogy*, which has its foundation in the work of Eduard Lindeman, but was largely developed in the work of Malcolm Knowles. Andragogy was viewed

by Knowles (1980) as a theory of how adults learn, which he stated was different than how non-adults learn. Brookfield (1986) cites a lack of empirical evidence that andragogy works, but Bradley, (2010) has shown significantly higher levels of satisfaction among andragogical learners.

The fourth topic was *online learning and use of technology.* Here I discussed Palloff and Pratt's (2007) advocacy for online learning communities as a way to conduct faculty development through faculty learning communities and online discussion forums. Ludwig-Yardman & Woolley (2000) see virtual communities as places of "shared creation" and Yeh (2010) identifies different types of online learning communities as active collaboration, passive collaboration, individualized participation, and indifference. Cercone (2008) believes it is important for course designers to understand adult learning theory when developing online courses.

In the last topic, *social networking and virtual learning communities*, I referred to the pioneering work of Howard Rheingold (1993), who pointed out that virtual communities, just like real communities, require hard work to be true communities. Ziegler, Paulus and Woodside (2014) see the need for more research on how informal learning takes place, specifically in online discussion forums, and Lave and Wenger (1991) and Sawchuk (2008) have shown that learning does take place in online conversations. How group meaning occurs is less well understood.

I also noted that built into the core code of Moodle, an open source LMS developed by Martin Dougiamas and Peter Taylor, is a framework to evaluate the quality of discourse in online discussions based upon the theory of women's ways of knowing originally developed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986). This rating scale highlights two distinct learning styles; *separate knowing and connected knowing*.

The recurring theme that weaves these topics together is one that Palloff and Pratt (2007) emphasized when they noted that technology should not be used for technology's sake, but rather as a *vehicle* for collaborative and transformative group learning.

Chapter three: The fundamental frequency

History, culture and description of the case

My story takes place at Columbia College Chicago, an urban arts college community of about 10,000 students that inhabits the south loop area of the city dispersed among a diverse array of rehabbed lofts, hotels and historic Chicago landmark buildings.

The school was founded in 1890 as the Columbia School of Oratory by Mary Blood and Ira Morey Riley, changing its name to Columbia School of Expression in 1905 and, by the mid 30's began to focus more on related and emerging technology career fields, such as radio broadcasting, a key element of Columbia's academic identity to this day. Over the next two decades, Columbia expanded its educational offerings to include courses in television, journalism and marketing, changing its name to Columbia College in 1944. However, by 1961, with a population of only 200 students, and under the new leadership of Mirron (Mike) Alexandroff, Columbia underwent a significant transformation into a liberal arts college with an open admission policy that encouraged high school students interested in studying with some of Chicago's best known and talented media and arts professionals. More significant to the culture of the college however, was Alexandroff's commitment to creating an institution with a mission to create social change and artistic activism. Randy Albers (1998), Chair of the Fiction Writing Department at the time of the following quote, said of Alexandroff's influence in the early eighties, "I became adjunct and then full-time, I began to realize, you know, that something more: that the College was really run by Mike Alexandroff. He was the person who had really given the vision to it and was largely responsible for, in some ways, keeping people aware of that vision and that mission " (p. 4).

In 1992, the school changed its name to Columba College Chicago, expanding its graduate programs and physical presence in the south “loop” of Chicago under the direction of Dr. John B. Duff. From 2000 to 2013, during Dr. Warrick L. Carter’s tenure as President, Columbia continued to significantly expand its presence in the loop and grew its student population to over 10,000 while continuing to expand its academic programs, administration and faculty (Columbia College Chicago, 2014). Columbia’s open admissions policy, while contributing to the significant growth in enrollment was also an important part of Columbia’s mission. As Albers (1998) states, “Well, open admissions was, you know—I soon came to realize when I first arrived at Columbia—was incredibly important in generating the kind of diversity of students that I had in my classes. And in giving an opportunity to students who had been historically under-served and who, you know, deserved an opportunity” (p. 5).

While the college continued to expand its course offerings and enrollment soared, technology infrastructure lagged. During the first part of the new millennium, with the school’s first learning management system being implemented in 2003, faculty and student adoption rates remained sluggish and attrition rates remained high. A five year Title III grant application was written to address faculty and student use of technology as well as improve retention rates through improved advising. The grant application was successful and received funding from the federal government and, as a part time faculty member who was a major proponent of online learning and the use of technology in the classroom, I was hired as the OASIS (Online Administrative Student Information System) facilitator in 2005 to provide training and develop materials for faculty and students in using Columbia’s learning management system (LMS) and advising tools.

The first three years of my work were spent developing training materials for the OASIS LMS and working with various departments to help prepare both faculty and administration for an increased online presence. Through running literally hundreds of workshops and bootcamps

as well as producing a variety of video tutorials and training materials, I became a familiar face to the Columbia Community. Likewise, I became familiar with many of the faculty, chairs and deans, as well as key administrators across the campus. In short, I became increasingly aware of how the Columbia community viewed online technology, OASIS, and the use of technology in the classroom in general. For example, there was a pervasive attitude that arts education should be primarily face to face and hands-on. The idea that theatre and dance classes, for example, could be offered in an online environment seemed far-fetched to many faculty members (and still does). While other departments, notably Arts Entertainment and Media Management, Social Science, Math and Science, English, and Film and Video were, at least, offering some courses either completely online or in a hybrid fashion, meeting occasionally with most of the coursework being offered online. Despite offering stipend supported training to all departments since 2005, by late 2007, I found a significant disparity between departments who were seriously interested in developing an online presence and those who were simply not interested at all. In addition, I found a great deal of resistance not only to the use of technology and the use of an LMS to enhance the teaching experience, but more specifically to the OASIS LMS itself. It became apparent that the technology being offered to faculty was, in and of itself, a key factor to faculty adoption of online learning and teaching.

While certain areas of the campus remained siloed and virtually walled off from the virtual community that exists to this day, key individuals became engaged with our efforts to adopt technology when appropriate pedagogically. As part of the Title III grant, we held campus wide meetings for deans, chairs and IT staff and set up various committees to help communicate and coordinate our efforts. While we had planned on expanding the use of OASIS as an online LMS for enhanced, hybrid and full online courses, there was significant resistance from key departments and faculty members to OASIS as a desirable LMS, so we decided to try something different and, with some help from the college webmaster, I downloaded and

installed Moodle on one of our computers in the Center for Instructional Technology. In the fall of 2008, we setup a pilot program with the Film and Video department and were off and running.

The culture begins to shift

By 2007, the administration realized there was a global shift among academic institutions to online and distance education. President Carter charged then Vice President for Academic Affairs, Louise Love, with leading a study group on e-learning. Among the participants were many of the key individuals who were well known across the campus for their early adoption of technology in the classroom and many of whom I was already working closely with on departmental training or development of online resources.

In addition, the group asked Professor Suzanne Robertson of the University of East London, a nationally recognized and knowledgeable advocate of e-learning, to act as consultant to the group. According to the report (Study Group on E-Learning, 2008), despite e-learning being a, "…requisite to a 21st century education" (p. 2), the campus offered only an average of 16 classes online from fall 2006 to spring 2008. The report concludes that, "Clearly the number of students benefitting from e-learning opportunities at a college that is one of the country's preeminent schools of media arts and communication is surprisingly low" (p. 4).

As mentioned previously, around the same time as the e-learning study group was meeting, a pilot program using the Moodle LMS was established operating out of the Center for Instructional Technology (CIT). I had downloaded the open source software and was running the installation on a computer under my desk. Our first customers were the faculty and staff of the Film and Video department in the fall of 2007. This was one of the departments that had been forced to operate their own servers outside of the school's infrastructure. But there were others who quickly became interested. In particular, the news of the "new" Moodle LMS on campus spread quickly among those key individuals in a few departments who were already doing their

best with tools at hand to build an online presence. But something else happened on the way to bringing courses online at Columbia; we began to build online communities.

A brief interruption while I almost die

It was also in December of that year that I fell victim to fairly advanced heart disease that required open heart surgery and took me out of the Columbia community for a couple of months. It could have been worse and I was grateful to be alive, as well as take the time to reflect on my work, life, family, friends and colleagues. Since fellowship in the truest sense of the word became more meaningful to me, it was fitting that our focus in the CIT turned to building support for online course development through a long established technology fellowship program.

The evolution of the fellowship programs

The CIT offered fellowships for faculty to help advance the mission of the school through a Technology Fellows program and an OASIS Fellows program up until 2007. However, both as part of the recommendation of the e-learning study group, and our expanding use of the Moodle LMS, the fellowship programs administered through the CIT underwent dramatic changes. First of all, we began to promote the use of the Moodle as the LMS of choice for building enhanced, hybrid and online courses and renamed the OASIS Fellows program to the LMS Fellows program. Second, as stated in the e-learning study group (2008) recommendations we began to, “offer an ‘extreme makeover’ pilot to gain experience and expertise with best practices in online learning” (p. 9).

The LMS Fellowship program became a catalyst for online technology adoption across the campus and would eventually spin-off the VLC Fellowship program itself. In 2010, as a result of cutbacks in Academic Affairs, the CIT merged with the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) and became the Center for Innovation in Teaching Excellence (CiTE). In 2011, we

created the VLC Fellows and renamed the LMS Fellows to the Moodle Fellows program. Many of the same key individuals who were early adopters of technology began to take on leadership roles as we sought to move Columbia towards adopting the technology required to develop and offer online courses.

By early 2013, over 150 departmental learning communities had formed, many of them a direct result of the VLC Fellowship program initiative. A description of the VLC Fellowship program on the CiTE web site (2014) states that,

> Up to 10 proposals will be funded at $1500 per faculty or staff member. This fellowship is designed to provide support and resources for faculty and staff members to create online resources and communities for a multi-section course or an entire department or program that meets an identified need. VLC Fellows will be able to create spaces for dialogue and interaction, as well as repositories of handouts, syllabi, multimedia resources, documentation, departmental procedures, and policies that full and part-time faculty and staff can access 24/7 (p. 1).

By late 2013, Columbia had added almost 50 new online courses and the number continues to rise. Moodle Fellows Suzanne McBride and Anne Becker (2013) provided the provost with a white paper on online learning including some of the challenges that faculty faced in the new information ecology, “The successful transition of instruction to the online environment – whether it’s a few courses in one department or a concerted effort college-wide to offer all levels and type of classes in this manner – is not simply a matter of faculty interest and motivation. Rather, it’s a complex process, heavily dependent on the level of institutional support” (p. 4).

In late 2013, the faculty Senate formed an ad-hoc committee for online learning charged with delivering to the full Senate a report and recommendations for supporting online and distance learning at Columbia. I was asked to be a member of that committee. Once again,

several members of the committee, including the Chair, were key individuals who had supported the use of technology in teaching at Columbia for a decade or more. Moreover, they were aware of the history and culture at Columbia, including the rich history of supporting a diverse student population. Some of these individuals were also active in online learning communities that not only served Columbia, but were interconnected with extended virtual communities outside of the Columbia culture.

In early 2014, the ad-hoc committee on online learning delivered its recommendations to the full faculty Senate. These recommendations were as follows:

> **Recommendation: 1** The college should form a high-level technology committee overseen and driven by senior leadership to develop short and long-term goals, and strategies that integrate both the needs of ICT and learning technologies. This committee must be centered on academic goals for future learners. Students and prospective students should be the primary client. Goals should include but not be limited to:
>
> - Increasing flexibility to include a more diverse student cohort;
> - Increasing teaching/learning interaction between teachers and students to develop more individualization of learning;
> - Commitment to developing skills in digital and information literacy throughout the curriculum;
> - Commitment to using technology to support the development of the following: future skills; of independent and life-long learning; initiative, communication; teamwork; adaptability; collaboration; networking; and thinking skills within particular disciplines, as well as among disciplines.
>
> **Recommendation: 2** College leadership should consider reorganizing oversight of Information Technology and the Center for Innovation in Teaching Excellence for

purposes of developing an integrated technology policy as well as tracking and accounting for technology resources. This oversight must include the Provost, CFO, as well as the offices of the General Counsel and Campus Environment. The traditional oversight of IT housed under the CFO is customary in most institutions given the range of activities an IT entity must facilitate and implement. The recent history of temporary CFOs has been devastating to IT. IT at Columbia even in its heyday was under-resourced by national and even local standards.

Recommendation: 3 Technology goals and strategies must come with clear tracking and assessment protocols.

Recommendation: 4 Academic leadership should recognize online learning and hybrid approaches are not the same as traditional face-to face classes. Using technology to slightly alter classroom teaching/learning simply adds cost to the enterprise with no measurable learning benefits. Assist school curriculum committees to push curriculum development to include technology as a default in any new courses and program development.

Recommendation: 5 Designing and funding comprehensive training using new developments and research in teaching and technology are needed. Develop platforms for ongoing discussions among faculty and administration about technology and teaching and learning.

Recommendation: 6 Aggressively identify potential areas of innovation in both online learning and alternative approaches to the traditional classroom unique to Columbia's circumstances and mission. Identify and support those individuals who currently show innovative promise.

Recommendation: 7 Discover ways that an arts and communication college is where it is with respect to learning technology, how it makes technology decisions and how it

> tracks and assesses the consequences of these decisions. The reason for this is solely to jumpstart a better, more accountable and nimble strategic planning and implementation process going forward (pp. 2-4).

These recommendations show a cultural awareness and maturation of ideas that had formed over a decade or more. The report from the ad-hoc committee provided a basis to ask more from the administration and, in particular, IT, to support the (not so) new information age of education and raised the bar for academic leadership as well. More important, this was a declaration that academic community as a democratic body was prepared to take ownership and responsibility for organizational and strategic planning. Their statement was clear and the motion to adopt the recommendations passed. Columbia faculty realized there would be no magic remedy from an outside consultant or *experts in the field*. It was time for Columbia faculty, administration and IT to bring Columbia into the 21st century.

Online culture readiness factors

Examining departmental readiness to develop online programs and support them has become a major focus of our work in the CiTE. I informally look at six factors when evaluating a department's ability to support online programming.

First, the **technology being used**. Is the LMS reliable and easy to use? Since many faculty found the OASIS LMS difficult to use and short on features, it was unlikely those faculty or departments would succeed in bringing more materials, content and activities online. Linked to this are the LMS features and adaptability to subject matter. For example, the LMS needed to be capable of easily managing asynchronous discussion forums as well as synchronous chats, large amounts of audio and video content in an arts and media institution like Columbia, easy communication with students, the ability to hold multiple file formats and interact with outside websites including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo and other sites, ease of site/course

duplication and, of great importance, the ability to easily create sites of interaction between faculty and administration, as well as departmental resource sites or online communities. OASIS made most of these things difficult and was, therefore, forcing many faculty and departments to seek out other alternatives for their practice. Included in this important aspect is reliability. All the best features in the world mean nothing if the infrastructure cannot support it and the technology fails. Online outages can undermine institutional confidence.

The second factor that plays a role in faculty adoption or readiness to adopt online technology into their teaching is the **perceived need and level of urgency**. Is there a need for an online presence and how urgent is it?

The third factor is access to **technology training and instructional design support**. Hand in hand these provide both the theory and practice of using an LMS and designing effective hybrid, online, or, in some cases, flipped courses. It is important for faculty to understand the pedagogical principles as well as technical steps of designing courses for their students. Is there practical support for the online technology, training of faculty and instructional design?

Fourth, **departmental support and expectations of faculty to have technology competencies**. If the department is invested in the professional development of its faculty, then they will take steps to develop a virtual community of practice within their department. These virtual communities usually adopt some form of andragogical learning, though in an informal sense only. In many cases, departments will encourage faculty to apply for VLC or Moodle Fellowships or enroll in MOOCs or courses elsewhere to develop online learning skills. In some cases the department will set goals and expectations for faculty competencies.

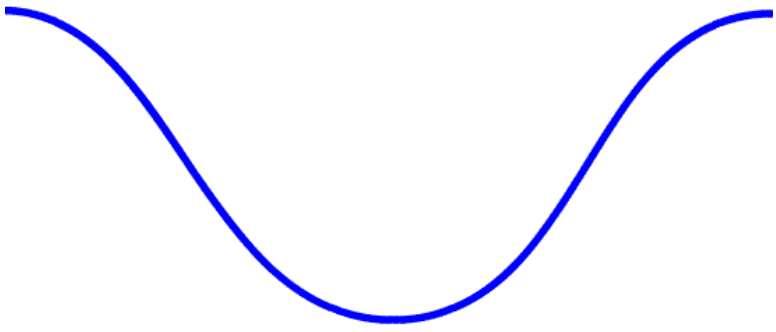
Fifth, **peer adoption and support** or peeragogy. This includes the level of technology usage in department and peer to peer support. The more that colleagues within a department

find the experience of using technology with their teaching beneficial to their students, the more likely the practice will spread.

A sixth factor is **cross-departmental collaboration**. This last major factor is related to peer adoption and support and reaches across departments when faculty collaborate, for example, and are exposed to the different culture of another department. The concept of connected knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) described earlier in this paper can, therefore, be applied at a macro level to departments themselves. Faculty as adult learners exhibit traits identified by Knowles (2000) and other researchers. More specifically, their learning may be more separate than connected and it is often difficult for them to see other ways of knowing.

These factors and, more specifically, the presence or absence of them in a department, provides a baseline for the establishment of a virtual learning community. I refer to this baseline as the fundamental frequency or the first partial in what is a set of resonating frequencies.. The animated waveform below (Diagram 5) shows the periodic nature of large wavelength, low frequency, high amplitude wave that represents the very foundation of the technological and online culture at Columbia.

Diagram 5. The fundamental frequency



Chapter four: Studying the case and culture

An ethnographic case study

The methodology used in this study was an ethnographic case study of the VLC program conducted across academic departments at Columbia College Chicago.

While I primarily conducted case study type research, I was uniquely positioned as an observer and passive participant in the program that was being studied. By collecting both observational data and reflecting on my own professional experiences with many of the study participants, I attempted to provide an ethnographic case study that reflects both the culture of online faculty learners, many of whom are artists, musicians, photographers and creative entrepreneurs, as well as the data collected from the bounded system of the VLC program at Columbia.

Case study research

The case, or bounded system used in this study, was the VLC program itself, described earlier in **Chapter 1: The research and the researcher**. The individual online communities in the program are comprised of faculty, administrators and staff typically of mixed gender, age and race and vary in size from 10 to 30 or more individuals. All online communities are also located within the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) at Columbia.

Case Study methodology has a broad interdisciplinary origin based upon the investigative realms of human behavioral sciences including sociology, psychology and anthropology. Historically, investigators from a wide array of disciplines illuminated and illustrated their research and findings through case studies provided as examples for their readers. Used in quantitative medical studies, political science, psychology, sociology, and historical analysis, to name just a few differing contexts since the early 1960's, it was not until

later that researchers like Merriam (1998), Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) identified case study as a unique qualitative methodology that can provide rich and highly descriptive detail of an event, entity, or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Case studies are the preferred methodology for researchers examining “how” and “why” questions about contemporary phenomena in natural settings over which they (the researchers) have little control (Yin, 2003. p. 1). Yin (2008) further defines case study research as “…an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18).

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of a case study is that the entity being studied is a bounded or contained system. This entity may be an individual, a group, community, institution, or even a program or project. However, even though the research involves the study of a bounded system, the research topic is usually a phenomenon associated with the entity.

A second characteristic associated with case study research is that the phenomenon or entity being studied is observed in a natural state also bounded by space and time (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006).

A third characteristic is that case study research is comprised of multiple sources of information, including, but not limited to, observation, archival materials and documents, anecdotes, surveys, interviews, official records and forms, audio visual materials, databases, and feedback forms. The variety of data helps provide a rich source of material for the researcher and can often lead to additional questions being asked about the phenomenon or entity being studied.

Related to this characteristic, Yin (1994) rationalized that the collection of data from multiple sources is also a means to triangulate the evidence for observed phenomena and thereby validate an observation or interpretation. In other words, if a phenomenon is observed

from one source of data, and then observed from another source of data in the same context, it can corroborate a researcher's findings that the phenomena may be linked to the specific set of circumstances being observed.

Furthermore, Merriam (2009) describes three unique features of qualitative case studies. She says they are:

- particularistic, meaning that they focus on a particular event, program or phenomenon;
- descriptive, meaning that they produce a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon being studied (the term thick description being borrowed from anthropology and referring to a comprehensive description of the entity or event being studied);
- heuristic, meaning they reveal to the reader a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied and illustrate previously unknown relationships and insights. While previous assumptions may be reinforced, others may be modified or dismissed as a result of new observations and interpretations.

Merriam goes on to say that, "As the product of an investigation, a case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 46).

While different authors offer a variety of case study typologies, Stake (1995), identifies three separate types of case studies depending on the researcher's interest or intent.

- Intrinsic, where the researcher is interested in a particular event, entity or program being studied. This is more closely aligned to narrative inquiry research, where the case being studied is unique and of a particular interest to the researcher.
- Instrumental, where the researcher is actually concerned with an issue and is seeking to use the case study to illustrate the issue or "…redraw a generalization. The case is of secondary interest…" (p. 437).
- Collective or multiple case studies where the researcher hopes to, once again, illustrate the issue, but uses multiple cases instead of a single case.

The purpose of using ethnographic case study methodology to conduct this study was to provide heuristic analysis of the experience of different individuals within the VLC program. Stake (2007) states that, “A case study provides vicarious instances and episodes that merge with existing icons of experience...” (p. 3).

Because my own research was essentially evaluating a method of professional faculty development, this case study should be considered intrinsic, as I was interested in a particular method of faculty development and how it impacted a specific population of faculty members at Columbia, an arts-based urban college. The bounded system in this case study was the VLC fellowship program coordinated through the Center for Innovation in Teaching Excellence (CiTE), a department within Academic Affairs at Columbia. While the VLC program was described earlier in chapter 1, I will briefly review it again here. The Virtual Learning Community (VLC) fellowship program at Columbia College Chicago supports faculty led online communities. In some cases, stipends are offered faculty to develop these virtual communities, but not always. All of these virtual communities are online (Moodle) sites made up of faculty members, departmental administrators and, in some cases, instructional technologists. The purpose of the VLC program is to provide instructors in departments and, often multi-section courses, access to course templates, materials, departmental resources and, most important, other faculty members like themselves. Various departments at Columbia participate in the VLC program through their own online learning communities which, in turn, are the social units of the case study.

Defining the ethnography

As stated previously in this section, I am uniquely positioned as an observer and participant in the VLC program at Columbia to warrant an ethnographic study as part of this research. While it may have been practical and simpler to limit my study to a case study of the

VLC program, my years of work and virtual cohabitation with many of the participants in the program offers an opportunity for a clearer exposure and wider perspective on the case being observed. Furthermore, the questions that guide this study point to the need to examine the culture of Columbia faculty and administrators engaged in the creation, management and maintenance of online learning communities and the VLC program itself.

With its roots in anthropology, ethnography has become a useful tool for qualitative research in a variety of fields, including education. The purpose is to describe a specific culture, including its beliefs, motivations and behaviors. Merriam (2009) says that culture, "…essentially refers to the beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people" (p. 27).

Ethnography is both a product (findings) and a process (Creswell 2007, Merriam 2009, Agar, 1980) that provides a "thick description" of the culture being observed. This process primarily involves immersion in the culture as a participant observer, a thorough examination of shared documents, records and artifacts as well as surveys, interviews and extensive field notes.

Creswell (2007) proposes a six step process when conducting an ethnography:

- Determine if ethnography is appropriate for the research and, if a cultural group plays a significant role in the phenomena being studied, "to explore the beliefs, language, behaviors, and issues such as power, resistance, and dominance" (p. 70).
- Locate the culture-sharing group to study and identify members who demonstrate shared language, patterns of behavior and attitudes throughout the group. This group may be marginalized or have restricted access requiring the researcher to gain access through, "…a gatekeeper or key informants" (p. 71).
- Perform an analysis of the culture-sharing group, including history, social interaction, learning, cognition, politics, economy and environment as well as, "…pervasive patterns

such as life cycles, events, and cultural themes" (p. 71). Creswell cites Wolcott (1987) who says that culture is not something "lying about" (Creswell, p. 41). Researchers assign attributes to the culture through observation and discerning patterns and themes.

- Determine what type of ethnography is to be used. Creswell notes that in the case of a critical ethnography, the researcher may need to, "…expose issues such as power, hegemony, and to advocate for certain groups" (p. 71).
- Conduct fieldwork by going to the location where the group works and lives and gathering information through observation and a variety of data collection methods, including surveys and interviews, for example. By conducting extensive data collection on site, the researcher must respect the members of the group, addressing issues such as reciprocity and "who owns the data" (p.72). Through analysis of the collected data, the researcher then begins to form a description of the culture-sharing group, "…focusing on a single event, on several activities, or on the group over a prolonged period of time" (p. 72).
- Finally, "Forge a working set of rules or patterns as the final product of this analysis. The final product is a holistic cultural portrait of the group that incorporates the views of the participants (emic) as well as the views of the researcher (etic)" (p. 72). Researchers may go on to develop other arts-based products including theatre, poems or plays.

Each online learning community at Columbia has a unique story to tell. They each have their own history, culture, membership and internal governance along with other unique features. Furthermore, key informants and participants may be found influencing and interacting with multiple learning communities. They represent, along with other VLC program members, communities within the larger Columbia community, often outspoken and sometimes marginalized, a characteristic Creswell notes as often associated with ethnographic research. However, while I will be analyzing the culture-sharing group of Columbia's online teaching and learning communities, I did not initially intend this to be a critical ethnography, but rather a way

to see this case study in a more accurate context of virtual communities created and sustained by culture-sharing groups over a significant period of time. That being said, it is difficult to maintain separation between the social and political aspects of how technology is used in academia. I will, therefore, let the data speak for itself and present my findings whether they be defined as critical or not.

Theoretical frameworks

The nature of this study requires some examination of multiple learning theories including transformative learning, social constructivism, andragogy, complexity, chaos and network. A theoretical framework that embraces many of these concepts is connectivism. This theoretical framework that was discussed in more detail in the literature review, lends itself to the use of ethnographic case study methodology as a means of studying the VLC program and professional faculty learning networks.

Networks, according to Siemens, are comprised of connections between nodes of individuals, groups, systems, fields, ideas, or communities. Connectivism starts with the individual, whose personal knowledge resides within a network, which then feeds into an organization, and ultimately provides learning back to the individual. “This cycle of knowledge development (personal to network to organization) allows learners to remain current in their field through the connections they have formed” (Siemens, 2004 p. 5).

A study of the VLC program also would be incomplete without viewing it, at least in part, through the lens of transformative learning theory. Although also discussed in more detail in the literature review, transformative learning theory helps to explain many of the experiences described by the study participants and observed by the researcher in online discussion forums and during training sessions or planning meetings.

Transformative learning may take place in adult online learning communities and, particularly, in the context of professional faculty development. Many of the adult educators who participated in this study bring years of experience as learners and teachers to these sites of interaction. They voluntarily reflect on their own practice through dialogue with others, and are exposed to new world views and ways of building knowledge through the VLC program. For many faculty in the program, this is a new way to interact with their peers and administrators. For others, fear of technology and new ways of learning and teaching may combine to create daunting obstacles to both personal and professional growth. By viewing this study through the lens of transformative learning theory, we do not underestimate the challenges for adults to relearn and adapt to new career conditions in the information ecology.

Rationale

My research questions are designed to explore how faculty members interact and learn in an online and social context, and within a framework of connectivist learning theory and andragogical assumptions. Ethnographic case study research allows me to examine more closely how the philosophical principles and assumptions of connectivism and andragogy exist and are manifested in the VLC program at Columbia.

Ethnographic case study research will also enable observation of these principles at work and to then study specifics of the case and interview participants face to face, so as to provide triangulated data for this study. By observing behaviors in the virtual world, and then being able to question participants about those same behaviors in a face to face interview, I will be able to provide additional depth and richness to this research. According to Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011),

> Using online interactions as a source of “observation” does, however, present certain challenges. For example, online conversations may well have deeply nuanced subtexts

> that depart markedly from the superficial meaning of the typed words. In the case of face-to-face conversations, a researcher can observe gestures, body language, use of space, and intonation patterns to go beneath the surface of the discourse (p. 473).

Participant selection

The case that was studied is the VLC program which is a bounded system made up of Departmental online learning communities across the Columbia campus. These communities are comprised of faculty, administrators and staff within separate academic departments, but participating in similar online and social learning settings. Participation in the VLC program is voluntary but encouraged to varying degrees depending on the department. All participants of this study are current or past members of the VLC program. The VLC program is administered by the CiTE where I am employed as an Instructional Specialist and one of the coordinators for the program. The social components of the VLC program are online learning communities.

For the purpose of this study, online learning communities are defined as online (Moodle) sites made up of usually between 10 to 30 faculty members, departmental administrators and, in some cases, instructional technologists embedded as facilitators. The purpose of the online learning communities that make up the VLC program, is to provide instructors in multi-section courses access to course templates, instructional design support, topical materials, departmental resources and, most important, other faculty members like themselves. Participants access most course teaching materials via Moodle web pages that act as repositories and sites of interaction. However, online community members can and do operate outside of the “walled garden”, as Frances Bell (2011, p. 100) calls it, of the Moodle LMS. VLC program members may communicate through asynchronous discussion forums or synchronous video chats and, in at least one scenario, actually contribute to the online learning community by posting alternate web links, readings and suggestions for assignments. All of the

VLC program members included in this study interact primarily via the Moodle LMS, which is an open source LMS being used at Columbia College, but in some cases also utilize social media and other web based tools.

I used typical, convenient and network purposeful sampling types as identified by Merriam (2009, pp. 78-79).

First, the sample is typical because the faculty members are typical of the general population across the Columbia college community. As Patton (2002) notes, the sample is, "… not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual" (p. 236). This is not to say, however, that the sample is typical across all campuses or colleges. Columbia College Chicago is primarily an urban arts-based college with a predominance of faculty who are artists, photographers, musicians, writers, dancers, fashion designers, and film makers, to name a few. It is my intention to describe some of the unique characteristics of this culture as part of this study.

The sample is also convenient as the faculty are located within the VLC which facilitates communication, minimizes costs of collecting data and serves as a "common ground" for all participants. The environment is, therefore, the same for all case study participants which minimizes the variable of online environment as being a factor in the findings.

A third purposeful sampling type being used is network sampling. A number of key participants have been selected because they not only are typical of the VLC bounded system, but because they have the ability to encourage other departments and VLC members to participate in the study. These key participants have the ability to network on behalf of the researcher and extend the research induction process.

The VLCs also lend themselves to ethnographic case study research as they are bounded by time and space. The VLCs are primarily active during the academic school year and take place within the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS), although part of the

study will determine to what extent faculty members use other online social networks and tools outside of the LMS to enhance their teaching.

Data collection methods

Data was collected by observation, archival records, online surveys and interviews.

The process for conducting this study was as follows,

Initial Data Collection

I collected data from 32 participants who were part of the VLC program at Columbia. All of these participants completed online surveys. During the course of my research, I continued to meet with many of the participants in face to face meetings, workshops, or during online workshops and camps, or via discussion forums that were part of online learning communities like the CiTE Fellows Moodle sites, for example. Six of the 32 participants were selected as key participants (see below) for interviews. In addition, I reviewed feedback and evaluation forms from CiTE workshops, archival materials from committees, working groups and consultants, and surveys of faculty conducted by Columbia since 2007.

Observation

Observation included interacting with study participants during meetings, training workshops and online discussion forums. As an instructional technologist at Columbia for the past 9 years, I have been a participant observer in the culture of the faculty at Columbia and have been able to observe the culture as a whole over a period of time. For example, in my work at the CiTE, I have participated with many departments in training of faculty for technology use and online teaching and learning. Most of the training programs take place either in departmental training rooms, or in the CiTE lab, a modern facility complete with laptops, iPads, document cameras, smart board and walls that are coated with *Idea Paint*, a great way to allow collaboration with participants in workshops. I have observed and participated in at least 20

such departmental workshops and training sessions over the past three years and conducted over 200 workshops with faculty and staff on using technology in the classroom and particularly using the Moodle LMS. My field notes include digital files in a variety of formats, including Word, Pages, Google Drive Docs and Portable Document Format. These field notes are records of events that have taken place during the course of observations and data collection. On some occasions, I have kept handwritten notes in folders. In addition, during the course of this study, I have observed study participants during planning meetings for technology and VLC related departmental projects. For example, I was a part of a departmental planning task force that met throughout the spring of 2014 to develop online courses across multi-section courses. This required working with faculty and support staff in the department in our CiTE lab and required the participation of several CiTE staff members to address questions of online pedagogy, instructional design and the design of a system for deploying course templates to section teachers, as well as supporting their training in how to teach and support students online.

In my role at the CiTE, I have been the lead instructor for LMS training and the use of technology both in physical and virtual (online)classrooms. During training workshops I have been able to interact with, and observe faculty, including study participants. I have also been able to collect data from feedback and evaluation forms completed by faculty and study participants after various training sessions and workshops. Specifically, I have been able to talk to participants in the program both face to face and in virtual settings about the expectations they have for their own learning and professional development as members of the VLC program. Most of these conversations have been informal in nature.

Online discussion forums have been a great source of data for the purpose of this study. Over the past three years, I have facilitated over 20 multi-week online courses during which faculty were engaged with each other in discussions relating to the use of technology, online learning communities and the VLC program. In addition, I have participated in multiple online

learning communities in multiple departments. For the purpose of this study, I have included dialogue from four specific online learning community sites including the 2014 CiTE Fellows VLC sites and the 2012, 2013 and 2014 online summer Moodle camps.

Online summer Moodle camps have been conducted for the past five years through the CiTE. Newcomers to the fellowship program, including VLC, LMS, and Online Instructional Fellows, are strongly encouraged to take this one week fully online course to immerse themselves in online culture and gain experience in online teaching and learning. The camp is also open to any Columbia faculty member. Each day of Moodle camp requires learning several new online features of the LMS as well as participating in ongoing online discussion forums with fellow faculty members and CiTE facilitators framed around topics such as; online pedagogy, working with students online, and instructional design for online courses. The camp is rigorous with participants often spending anywhere from 4 to 8 hours each day completing coursework and posting messages to the forums. CiTE Fellows who have taken online camps or courses before may be asked to co-facilitate these camps as part of their fellowship, but this is voluntary. The total number of participants in the online camps are usually capped at fifteen. Part-time faculty who participate in the camp receive a stipend provided they attend for the entire week and complete the coursework to the satisfaction of the camp facilitators. These camps are designed in general with Knowles' (1980) andrgagocal assumptions in mind. Facilitators allow faculty to engage with each other and maintain a learner-centered approach to the course management. For example, faculty are provided with empty courses, or *sandboxes*, in which they can *play* around with new LMS tools and features they have learned while in camp. However, their sandbox courses are their own and they may use a variety of different tools and approaches to designing their own courses rather than being told what is right or wrong. In these camps, along with other online learning community sites, the dialogue between faculty, when facilitators remain as passive observers, is rich with examples of mutual support and

advice, shared goals and challenges and stories of personal triumph over fears and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

Archival records

Archival materials used in this study included documents such as guidelines for faculty on participating in online learning communities, past discussion forums from departmental resource centers and online training courses, VLC program materials, including requests for proposals and program descriptions, VLC program reports, CiTE annual reports, and Columbia surveys of faculty use of technology, the LMS and attitudes toward online teaching from 2008 and 2011.

Online surveys

An important part of the data collection process also included conducting an online survey with the 32 participants involved in the VLC program who participated in this study. Of the 32 participants, 19 were female and 13 were male. Ethnicity was heavily skewed to white (27) with the remaining participants being African American (2), Asian (2) and Latino (1). Other demographic characteristics of the participant pool can be found in the VLC Questionnaire (Attachment 1).

A sample of online survey questions include:

- Discuss how the VLC encourages different views and perspectives.
- Discuss how the VLC encourages you as a teacher to be self-reflective and a continual learner.
- Describe how the VLC has made you reflect on any concerns or fears you may have about the use of technology in the classroom.

The online survey responses were saved in both portable document format for easy review of narrative responses, and in spreadsheet format for easy reference to demographic data associated with respondents.

Selection of Key Participants

I selected 6 key participants within the VLC program for the interview phase and conducted interviews. These 6 key participants included individuals who were part of the VLC program, but played different roles in various departments. In addition to representing a variety of viewpoints, they were selected because of my interest in their responses to the online survey, as well as their level of activity in the VLC program or online communities at Columbia. I have used pseudonyms for the key participant names in this study.

Key Participant Profiles

Christine is a full-time lecturer. She has taught at Columbia since 2005 and is largely responsible for creating the department's online learning resource center. Christine has a Master of Science degree in Human Resource Development & Administration and, in addition to her teaching, has been active in community and professional organizations in youth mentoring using a variety of adult learning and motivation techniques to help people succeed. Christine has also been an advocate of online teaching and learning and catalyst for redesigning traditional face to face courses for online delivery. She has been a recipient of the VLC Fellowship and has attended many of the online teaching and technology training programs offered through the Center for Innovation and Teaching Excellence (CiTE). In addition to teaching online courses in her department, she has begun to collaborate with the CiTE in facilitating online courses in faculty development college-wide.

Robert is an Associate Chair. He has Masters degree in Fine Arts and is an independent filmmaker, producer, and editor. He has spent a good deal of time researching education philosophy and is well versed in the work of Rheingold, Siemens, Downes, and other technologists. Robert is a pioneer of online teaching and the use of internet based technologies at Columbia but has also been a consistent critic of what he's has often viewed as inadequate IT infrastructure, software, and policies. He was appointed by his colleagues in the faculty Senate

to Chair the Ad-hoc Committee on Distance Learning in 2013, and currently serves as a Senior Fellow to the CiTE.

Jenny is an Associate Professor. She holds a Masters degree in Fine Arts and is an interdisciplinary artist, activist and educator. Jenny is also an early adopter of technology at Columbia and both an advocate and critic at times of the college infrastructure, systems and policies. She comes from a background of civic engagement, and acute cultural and artistic awareness. Some of her fondest memories include handing out flyers against the Vietnam war with her activist parents and her many years as an artist studying, teaching, exhibiting and collaborating abroad in such far-flung places as Berlin, Japan, Israel and South Korea. Jenny has always been engaged with *pushing the envelope* technologically as an educator at Columbia and often talks about her surprise at the reluctance of other educators to embrace technology, online learning, and the LMS as a means to introduce and reinforce teaching and learning of any discipline.

Craig is a Director in Academic Affairs at Columbia. He holds a Masters degree in Fine Arts and teaches part-time as a part of his employment at Columbia. Craig directs programs across the campus in faculty development with a particular focus on effective instructional practice. He sees himself as being more in a support role of faculty and mentoring rather than direct involvement or facilitation of online learning communities. He oversees the CiTE Fellowship programs reviewing proposals and communicating with faculty and students across the college.

Sandra is an associate director in the CiTE and teaches part-time. She has a Masters degree in Fine Art and is an accomplished and nationally known author of fiction and short stories. Sandra works with faculty through the CiTE to encourage and help them develop learner-centered approaches to face-to-face, hybrid, and online teaching. Sandra has developed many unique workshops for faculty to help them become critically reflective with their

practice. She is a highly respected campus facilitator and a strong proponent of using social media for art and activism.

Roger is the Chair of an academic department. He has a Masters degree in Fine Arts and is a world renowned researcher and photographer. Roger has been a strong advocate for the online learning and teaching in his department and across the college in general. He has encouraged faculty in his department to embrace the use of technology and online learning and teaching. Roger has worked closely with the CiTE to support professional faculty development in his department and has been an active and enthusiastic participant in the VLC program. Sample interview questions included,

  - Please describe for me the connection between teaching communities (VLCs) and your professional or even social communities?
  - Please describe any obstacles to online learning and teaching you have encountered at Columbia.
  - Can you talk a little more about power relationships you have experienced between faculty and administration, for example?

- Interviews were conducted on site at Columbia and lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. An audio recording was made and then transcribed following the actual interview.
- Transcripts of interviews were forwarded to interviewees to ensure they had a copy and could check for accuracy of the interview.
- The data was analyzed from each interview.
- Follow up interviews were conducted where appropriate to probe areas that needed further clarification or that were of particular relevance to the study and to pursue themes that emerged during data analysis.

Data analysis methods

The process of data analysis included a review of documentation from field notes, observations, surveys, interviews and artifacts and using a process that was both inductive and comparative to reveal patterns and themes throughout the data. Merriam (2009) states that the goal of data analysis is, "…to find answers to your research questions. These answers are also called categories or themes or findings" (p.176).

I began my search for categories and themes by building an inventory of materials found on the various VLC program sites (online learning communities), including course syllabi, reference materials, glossaries and general staff resources that were created by departments for faculty use. I then examined sites of interaction between faculty members, including asynchronous discussion forums and areas where faculty can post articles of interest to the entire VLC membership. By creating this inventory of documentation and artifacts, certain content and usage patterns emerged across the multiple VLC program sites that enabled me to construct an online survey for the members of those communities. For example, having noted the extensive use of discussion forums on nearly all of the sites, I added a question in the survey that read, "Please describe how the discussion forums have helped with your professional development." Another question asked generally about why some members of the community were less likely to engage in online discussion forums. "Describe how the VLC has made you reflect on any concerns or fears you may have about the use of technology in the classroom." Furthermore, these survey questions were directly related to the guiding questions of the study.

Even while survey results were coming in, I began selecting respondents to conduct interviews. Reading through the survey results, broad themes began to emerge that guided my questions both during the interview process and afterwards as well. According to Merriam

(2009), it is important to begin the process of data analysis during data collection rather than waiting until it has all been collected. “Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating” (p. 171).

Creswell (2007) believes that qualitative data analysis in general forms what he calls the Data Analysis Spiral and that, rather than being a linear approach, researchers are constantly circling around between the multiple facets of analysis beginning their first loop with data management and ending with an account or narrative at the top of the spiral. The six phases in this spiral process vary in detail across the five major research typologies, and, in particular, with the two research typologies being used in this study, namely, ethnography and case study. These six phases are data managing, reading and memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting, and representing and visualizing (p. 156).

Creswell notes that the initial two phases in data analysis are similar, if not identical in both ethnographic and case study research. During phase one, data managing, both research types require the creation and organization of files for data. During phase two, reading and memoing, both research types require reading through materials and transcripts, making notes and forming initial codes. However, the describing, classifying, interpreting and representing, visualizing phase vary between the two research approaches and required separate treatment in the study findings. Creswell goes on to define the ethnographic describing phase as including a description of the social setting, actors, events and drawing a picture of the setting. During the classifying phase, the ethnographer analyzes data for themes and patterns. The next phase is interpreting the findings and lastly, in the representing and visualizing phase, the ethnographer presents a narrative of the findings enhanced by tables, figures and diagrams where appropriate (p. 156).

In case study research, Creswell defines the describing phase as including a description of the case and its context. During the classifying phase, categories are aggregated to form

themes. In the interpreting phase, the case study researcher uses direct interpretation and develops naturalistic generalizations. Finally, in the representing and visualizing phase, the case study researcher presents an in-depth picture of the case or cases using narrative, tables, figures and diagrams where appropriate (p. 156).

As a starting point, and in analyzing the survey and interview data, I began by looking for units of data or bits of information that could be categorized. As Merriam (2009) states, “The construction of categories is highly inductive. You begin with detailed bits or segments of data, cluster, cluster data units together that seem to go together, then “name” the cluster. This is a category or theme or finding” (p. 183).

During this initial phase of data analysis, I made notations next to survey results and interview transcripts that appear relevant and important to my research questions or even the general topic. This process is called coding and, because I want to be open to findings that may be different from what I expect to find, this step of the process is called open coding. This open coding is followed by axial coding which, according to Marshall and Rossman (2011), is the process of, “…grouping the codes according to conceptual categories that reflect commonalities among codes” (p. 215).

Merriam (2009) describes the logic of data analysis as being in three phases, the first being the discovery phase, where the research is totally inductive, the second being discovery and verifying, which is both inductive and deductive, and the third phase being testing and confirming, at which point the researcher is in “deductive mode”.

Category construction, while being an inductive process, should be closely linked to the research topic and, according to Merriam (2009), meet several criteria:

- Categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research. In effect, categories are the answers to your research question(s).

- Categories should be exhaustive, that is, you should be able to place all data that you decided were important or relevant to the study in a category or subcategory
- Categories should be mutually exclusive. A particular unit of data should fit into only one category. If exactly the same unit of data can be placed into more than one category, more conceptual work needs to be done to refine your categories.
- Categories should be sensitizing. The naming of the category should be as sensitive as possible to what is in the data. An outsider should be able to read the categories and gain some sense of their nature. For example, “time” does not reveal as much information as “time management”.
- Categories should be conceptually congruent. This means that the same level of abstraction should characterize all categories at the same level. For example, while the categories “produce” and “canned goods” are at the same level, “fruit” is not, as it would more accurately be described as a subcategory of produce (pp. 185-186).

The process of categorization is not only inductive, but also reductive. Most researchers cited in this paper agree that starting with between 20 to 30 categories and then narrowing them down to five or six themes is most useful and illuminating.

A helpful four step method to distill these categories into manageable themes is suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1981):

- First, the number of people who mention something or the frequency with which something arises in the data indicates an important dimension.
- Second, the audience may determine what is important - that is, some categories will appear to various audiences as more or less credible.
- Third, some categories will stand out because of their uniqueness and should be retained.
- Fourth, certain categories may reveal “areas of inquiry not otherwise recognized” or “provide a unique leverage on an otherwise common problem” (p. 95).

Developing categories and subcategories and analyzing how they are linked together moves toward an interpretation of the data and findings. From these findings, models can be constructed to describe the data.

As mentioned previously, ethnographic analysis and case study analysis vary in the descriptive through interpretive phases of the data analysis. In ethnographic data analysis, describing the setting, actors, and events in a historical (time) and situational (space) context is important to understanding the shared-culture group. Through analyzing the data, themes and patterns are used to explain and make sense of how the culture “works”. This part of the study, resulting in a narrative and schematic presentation provides a context for the case study findings.

In this study, I have described the setting, actors, events and culture through devoting an entire chapter (3) to the history and culture of the Columbia community with an emphasis on those innovations, technology events and key agents of change who have been a part of the story about how technology, online learning and teaching, online learning communities and the VLC Fellowship program have emerged at Columbia. In addition, I have provided a graphical representation of that culture describing it as the f*undamental frequency* of a larger set of frequencies. This model was described at the end of chapter one.

Chapters five and six describe the findings from the case study analysis that are written in both narrative form and with graphic representation within the RF model described previously. Wherever possible, I have tried to add actual examples of interactions and observations, such as an excerpt from an actual online exchange within a facilitated learning community.

Dependability issues

The dependability of both qualitative and quantitative research relies on various factors including validity, reliability, transferability, and ethics. However, researchers and practitioners in

the social sciences often place their trust in the study findings of a single case or phenomenon being studied, rather than large random samples of the population more common to quantitative research. While qualitative research provides rich data and findings rather than sets of numbers, there is a need for high standards and dependability of those data and findings. Consequently, qualitative researchers need to assure readers that they have undertaken strategies as part of their research to ensure internal credibility, reliability, external validity or transferability, and strong ethical standards during the course of the research.

Internal validity

Internal validity in qualitative research means that the findings or categories of data match the reality of the situation. However, as Maxwell (2005) points out, “Validity is a goal rather than a product: it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative: It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions” (p. 105).

But while reality remains illusive in qualitative research, there are a number of ways to increase the credibility of a research study. The first way is called triangulation. While there are different types of triangulation, including multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings (Denzin, 1978), I used the multiple sources of data triangulation method. In this method, I used multiple sources of data to compare information, including observation, online surveys, and interviews. Specifically, I was able to cross reference the answers to similar questions in survey and interview questions with different VLC participants, while observing the VLC sites and discussion forums at different times.

A second way to increase credibility is through member checks. As I conducted interviews, I transcribed then coded the interview, then sent the transcribed interview with my

notes to the interviewee asking for their feedback on my interpretation of the interview. This is sometimes called respondent validation. Merriam (2009) states that, “Although you may have used different words (it is your interpretation, after all, but derived directly from their experience), participants should be able to recognize their experience in your interpretation or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives” (p.217).

A third way to strive for increased credibility is through prolonged engagement in data collection. As I have stated previously, I am uniquely positioned with my role at Columbia to have been exposed for some time to online teaching and learning communities at Columbia, as well as many of the participants in the study. However, engaging in data collection as a researcher has been a different experience and perspective for me and it has taken considerable time to feel adequately immersed in the data and to see the emerging categories and themes. In particular for me, and closely aligned to this concept of prolonged engagement in data collection, is a fourth way to ensure credibility, called reflexivity. According to Merriam, “Investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken….Such a clarification allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data” (p. 219).

This has been an important part of my study as in articulating my own role at Columbia I can, not only address the issue of adequate time spent collecting data, as well as observing the VLC program and culture-sharing group, but also address how I have reflected on my own role as adult educator/researcher and the biases of researching the work I am actively engaged in.

A fifth strategy to enhance the credibility of my study was the peer review of my draft documents and findings by fellow cohort members of the ACE doctoral program and my advisors.

Reliability

A critical question in qualitative research is whether the findings make sense when compared to the data. According to Merriam (2009), reliability does not mean that replication of the same study will give the same results, but rather that, "…given the data collected, the results make sense - they are consistent and dependable. The question then is not whether the findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 221).

Strategies that can be used to ensure this dependability include those mentioned in the previous section, including triangulation, member checks, time spent collecting data, reflexivity and peer review. Another strategy that can be used to ensure the findings make sense with the data being collected is to keep a log on the research process. This is also called an audit trail. By keeping track of the how data was collected and analyzed, researcher notes and how categories and themes were determined, the researcher can provide outsiders with a way of tracing the journey (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). During the course of my research, I kept notes the old fashioned way in a spiral notebook, but most often used the software on my iPhone called *Notes*. This way, I was able to also speak directly into my smartphone and have it automatically record my thoughts or reminders which could easily be retrieved from any number of devices using iCloud. Online surveys, reports, and transcripts of interviews were first roughly coded by hand with notes in the margins of the pages, then I imported surveys, reports, and interview transcripts into another software program called n*Vivo,* which is specifically designed for qualitative data analysis. While I still relied most heavily on my handwritten notes, NVivo did help with the organization of minor and major themes, triangulating nodes, or my main findings across multiple sources, demographic data, and keywords.

Transferability

Transferability is a concept coined by Lincoln and Guba to describe the process of applying research findings from a qualitative study to other sites. The “burden” of this transferability resides with the person trying to apply the findings to a new context or site, rather than the original researcher, who cannot control when or where their research may be applied. A couple of strategies can be used to increase the potential for transferability. First, by providing a rich, thick description of the phenomena being observed, the likelihood of others to be able to understand the context and transfer the phenomena to other sites increases. Second, maximum variation in the sample can increase the likelihood of transferability. If the study sample includes a greater variety of participants, the more likely others can apply the findings to their own situation.

Ethics

The ethics of the investigator are of utmost importance to the validity of the research process. Merriam states that, “Although policies, guidelines, and codes of ethics have been developed by the federal government, institutions, and professional associations, actual ethical practice comes down to the individual researcher’s own values and ethics” (p. 230).

In any qualitative research, the researcher must guarantee, at the very least, participants privacy and protection from harm. In addition, because I observed, surveyed, and interviewed fellow Columbia employees, it was important that I reassure participants that the words in the Informed Consent form were meant to signify a mutual understanding that I extended to them. Not only did I intend to assure them of their anonymity, but I wanted them to continue to participate in the process of validating my findings, through member checks and ongoing feedback through the entire induction > analysis > deduction cycle. Over the course of my research, I have had to go back to the study participants in a variety of situations and we were

able to, in many cases, keep each other updated about my research and further ideas or thoughts that they had since our interviews.

Early in the data collection process, some of the interview data showed influence of power relationships from administration (down) to faculty and staff in the development and execution of the VLC program and online teaching and learning practices. As a researcher, it is important to understand multiple perspectives, including those of administrators who were a part of this study as well. As previously stated, while I did not set out to conduct a critical ethnography, nevertheless, power relationships do exist here at Columbia as they do across all academia. These findings do show such relationships as having negative outcomes on the development of vibrant online learning communities. It is important that I do not try to hide nor influence the true nature of the data and what is says.

Observation raises some other ethical issues that, as a member, facilitator and participant of many online learning communities, faculty training courses and workshops at Columbia, I must address in my role as researcher. To many of the participants in the VLC program, I am known as an online facilitator, instructional technologist, instructional designer at times, but they had not encountered me before as a researcher. I had meetings with members from two of the online learning communities I was observing and informed them about my research and asked for their involvement, including completing the online survey. This has been an ongoing process requiring follow up on a group and individual basis to encourage faculty and administrators to complete surveys and, occasionally, agree to interviews. From an ethical standpoint, it was important to make sure faculty knew that their online learning community may be used as part of this study. However, it was never my intention to make faculty feel like they were being spied upon. If at some point I chose to use certain artifacts (screen captures) from past discussion forums that had animated and lively faculty interaction on an important subject for this study topic, then I asked for specific permission to use that event from the participants.

Otherwise, when observing a discussion forum in an online community in real time, I notified participants before they posted to the forum that their posts may be used as part of this study and gave them an opportunity to opt out of the forum discussion.

In collecting online materials, syllabi, training materials and other VLC program documents, I have provided materials relevant to the study. While opportunities exist for researchers to include documents and materials only favorable to their position, I have asked active VLC program members to point out materials that are significant in the functioning of the their online learning communities. Also, through the use of Moodle site log data (a digital trail of when users are logging on and what they are accessing), I have been able to see which documents are routinely accessed and which are not.

Lastly, I have been fortunate to learn and teach and build strong relationships at Columbia over the years. My work has also enabled me to forge a reputation as a trustworthy educator, administrator, and colleague. As a researcher, my reputation is now dependent on carrying out this study in a methodical, professional and ethical manner. As Merriam states, "… part of ensuring for the trustworthiness of a study - its credibility - is that the researcher himself or herself is trustworthy in carrying out the study in as ethical a manner as possible" (p.234).

Chapter five: Perfect partials and striking resonance

The VLC program, like any other similar faculty development initiative is an evolving program always in a state of flux. It reflects many of the same aspects of the departments through which it operates. During the course of this study, six major themes emerged:

- Resistance to technology
- Professional development
- Creation of knowledge
- Community building
- Giving voice to all
- Political and social change

In this chapter I will discuss the first three themes, as these make up the first set of overtones that are dominant frequencies in the RF model. *Resistance to Technology*, *Professional Development*, and *Creation of Knowledge.* While resistance to technology may seem like a negative, non-resonant frequency, I see it as the necessary frequency generator for change in many individuals and departments. It is precisely resistance to technology or any change of learning and teaching habits that creates the necessary climate for transformative learning to occur. This disorienting dilemma can be the pick that plucks the string and sets the wave in motion.

Resistance to technology

While resistance to technology at Columbia takes many forms, as stated previously, the most consistent argument that faculty have made against online interaction has been that they simply would not like the lack of face to face interaction nor do they believe their subject matter should be taught in an online setting. However, other *micro-resistances* to the use of technology

include low prioritization of technology projects, lack of institutional policies and procedures from senior administration, lack of direction from administration, lack of support for IT and technology infrastructure, to name just a few. These micro-resistances to the use of technology can be best described as ways that individuals and institutions resist adopting or even acknowledging advances in technology through indirect practices. More overtly, at the institutional level, resistance can occur through calling for an endless stream of studies, reports, and surveys into the need for such technology or result in spending tens of thousands of dollars on consultants to advise the best course of practice while never actually acting on the recommendations of either reports or consultants. At an individual level, micro-resistances are recognized as excuses for not using technology. In my own experience over the years, I have heard a litany of reasons why both OASIS and Moodle do not enable faculty to teach online. Whether offering too few or too many features, usually software is neither intuitive, nor capable of doing what the resistant instructor wishes it to do. Once one problem is solved, another one arises until the summary judgment ensues, “I can’t put my content online because the school’s software is not good enough!”

However, resistance most often manifests itself in the form of fear among faculty. The fears most frequently cited by study participants include:

- Fear of new ways of learning
- Fear of new ways of teaching - employment security
- Fear of change and being overwhelmed - too much of a time commitment
- Fear I will look like I don’t know what I’m doing - being exposed

In a 2011 Survey of Faculty on Online Learning conducted by the Academic Affairs department at Columbia, out of 201 respondents who actually completed the survey, 63.6% of faculty responded that they, “… would not like the lack of face-to-face interaction”. 52.6%

responded that, “The subject matter I teach should be taught face-to-face”, and 42.2% responded that they are, “…afraid the college might decide this is a better and cheaper way for all courses to be taught” (p. 39). Among those respondents who had already taught online (23.1%), faculty identified actual experiences which included both positive and negative outcomes. For example, more than half agreed with the following four statements:

- Some students will participate more readily online than face-to-face (65.3%);
- Being able to teach from any location provides more flexibility for the instructor (63.3%);
- It takes more time than a traditional face-to-face course (59.2%);
- Students are empowered to be more responsible for their own learning (55.1%).

The majority of the respondents who had taught online agreed that it took more time to teach online than a traditional face-to-face class. In their open comments section, many of these faculty members suggested in general that there be more training and support to teach online, for the administration to realize that online education is important and to take it more seriously, and for faculty and staff to acknowledge that not every student does well with online learning. (p. 1).

Fear of new ways of learning

“I don’t want to drown” ~ Christine

Fears about online teaching and the use of new technology cause many faculty members to reflect on their own teaching and learning styles and how they view education in general. Study participants reported a wide array of anxieties and fears about engaging

students and peers in online communities. One of my interviewees, Christine, talked about her own fears and sharing with her colleagues,

> "…we can probably sit here and sound like psychologists and say well gee where does that resistance come from? Well, fear of the unknown. Or I'm not so technically inclined. And I'm proving myself wrong with my own things that I named as my own resistances and then I'm turning around and sharing those with other people to help them feel less awkward with this. Because I would not describe myself as a technophile. And then I'm having fun with the technology and the more I communicate and share that information the more my confidence builds myself in going back to this tool and deciding that I'm never going to master it but its an effective way to engage, I'm meeting students where they are now and that increases my confidence in my own practice as an educator. If I can, six months ago I was terrified because I wasn't using Twitter and now I can speak in hashtags. If I could at least meet people where they are with it and find ways, I view it as complex problem solving is really what it is. Technology is not going away so people that are my age at 48 and older either have to jump in the pool and swim or drown. Right? And I'm deciding I don't want to drown."

Fear of new ways of teaching

"The currency in which we deal" ~ Craig

New ways of learning for many faculty are difficult because they are often reluctant to open themselves up to new experiences and differing perspectives as well as worldviews.

However, it is not only the fear of new ways of learning, but new ways of teaching as well that make faculty resistant to new technology. According to Craig,

> "There's a certain safety in keeping everything I do in my class to myself. There is a fear of having to relearn how to teach, right? Or rather learn technology in order to be able to teach. I think in academia, we are positioned and conditioned to feel that we are only as valuable as the particular expertise that we have that very few other people in the world have. I think that's the currency in which we deal."

As Craig points out, there is a very real fear among faculty that their services will be devalued once they share their work online. Yet, in order for any virtual community to work in a professional faculty setting, there needs to be open exchange of ideas and concepts. The Internet is full of free and open sharing of ideas, innovations, skill set training and more. One only needs to go to YouTube and search for almost any subject to see a plethora of tutorials and lectures on the subject. Some may be useful, many may not, but nevertheless and despite these fears, the professional and academic value of having content posted on the Internet or in online communities of practice or within a VLC is arguably worth more in today's information ecology than protecting it from discovery by others. Craig continues,

> "So it's that which I know that makes me valuable as a faculty member. And if I put it online, if I put it out there in such a way that it could be taught by somebody else, if I put it out there in such a way that it's documented that someone else could look at it, see it and use it, then who's to say that I will continue to be valuable to the institution, right?"

Fear of change and being overwhelmed

"…we've had a lot of people on faculty that have been teaching in a similar way for a long time" ~ Roger

Another pervasive concern, and one that appears to be well founded, is the concern that with increased use of technology, engagement in a VLC and online learning and teaching, one will become overwhelmed and caught up in a 24/7 work style where one is either responding to or being responded to all of the time. As an administrator, Roger sees the importance of being sensitive to these fears.

> "I think like, (in our department), we're an interesting sort of faculty because we are up the other end of the age scale, the majority of us. That's full time and part time people. And so you know it's that thing, you get set in your ways. You don't want to introduce too much too fast because it becomes difficult to take on more. And then as soon as it becomes difficult then you get resentment and you know you get push-back. And so that's for anyone, really. But I guess with (our department) we've had a lot of people on faculty that have been teaching in a similar way for a long time. Without a VLC. Without that type of resource. So it takes awhile for you to actually get them to understand how it operates or why you would want to invest your time in that when they've got limited time themselves in doing their practice and so on. Why would you actually want to learn a bit of software, another bit, you know in an environment that seems to have a lot of different platforms and softwares to deal with anyway? So what we did was we slowly rolled it out in a way that we did a lot of the work for them."

Craig also recognizes this fear of being constantly accessible by students and the amount of work involved,

> "I think there's a fear that it's non-stop. That if I interact with students online then I will have to do it 24 hours a day and not just 3 or 6 hours a week… I think there's a real fear that it's more work. And it is. At least to begin with, but perhaps for the long term. And I think that we're just not, I think that very few faculty have actually taken online classes. And so it's fear of the unknown. Right? Sometimes it becomes fear of the known because if you take the online class and you see how intensive that experience can be, that may scare you off. But if you've never taken an online class and you have no idea what that experience might be like, then I think that could be really frightening, ultimately."

Fear of being exposed

"I…do not want to appear…downright unintelligent" ~ Jenny

Another fear that is a real part of faculty resistance to online teaching, learning, and participation in the VLC, is the fear of being exposed or not knowing what you are doing. For some faculty who already are overly critical of their own teaching and feel they may lack certain knowledge about education as a discipline, being exposed among peers in online learning community discussion forums is yet another obstacle to their engagement. Jenny sums up her fears of being exposed in discussion forums:

> "I can speak for myself and I will extrapolate that I think that most people probably feel the same way, do not want to appear uninformed or intolerant or judgmental or just

> downright unintelligent. And so when I read different people's perspectives on something, and then I think, 'What is my position?' and, 'How would I express my position?' and (it goes back to what I said in the first question) am I expressing myself clearly enough? If it's in a conversation, it can be fleeting. Its interesting, I'm getting to my own psychology here, because in some respects there's no reason why a position you take or a statement you make in a forum at any day couldn't change the next day, or you couldn't as a result of that conversation or discussion, shift your perspective. But sometimes I feel like, damn, these people they're so smart or they have such good insights and there's no way I can match that. And that's where the daunting and frightening things come. Now on the other hand the encouraging thing is wow look at this thing that I am seeing. Gosh that model is a really great thought process and a really great way of responding. Or sometimes, ooh I don't want to respond like that. I would not want to be expressing things like that. There's the model that you want to follow and the model you sometimes don't want to follow."

It is worth noting how, at least in Jenny's case, the exposure to peer dialogue, anxieties included, within the asynchronous padding of time and space (one can read a post but does not have to reply immediately and may consider a response in one's own time and space) in a discussion forum allows an opportunity to reflect on one's own perspective and move to different points of view. I will continue to discuss the implications of asynchronous discussion forums in faculty online learning throughout the findings and conclusions of this paper, but Jenny, in discussing her fears of exposure in the above excerpt, seems to be describing at the very least a significant learning moment; one that leads to a "shift in perspective".

Christine also mentions how the VLC program has "transformed" her practice in her response to the "fear of technology" question in the online questionnaire. She says,

> "Working on this project has transformed me from a reticent technology user to an advocate! I am significantly less afraid and am now curious. Even when I have a technology failure, I ask students and colleagues for help trouble-shooting and always find ways to make technology part of what we are learning, both in and out of the classroom. Using technology more in the classroom fosters ongoing conversation outside of the classroom."

Craig says that,

> "I think that there is a fear that people will appear like they don't know what they're doing. Right? So to continue that thinking about just technology and having to learn a new technology, well what if I don't, I can in person I can almost control how my students see me. Online I can only somewhat control how my students see me."

Most of the study participants reported some level of anxiety and vulnerability in online teaching and learning environments and often with technology in general. However, for some, the need to be genuine and maintain a true learner-centered approach can be transformative. Christine talks about this in her engagement with students:

> "I have a commitment of meeting people where they are with the topic. So if that's a student or a group of students that's in front of me, I recognize I need to remain authentic to say I have things to learn from them and they have things to learn from me so I personally approach education and any interaction I have with any human being as an exchange. And if I'm caught up in ego and fear that I don't know how to use this

piece of technology I need to check that at the door and drop it and say teach me, show me. How are you communicating, where are you communicating, at what speed are you communicating and then I need to do my best to meet them where they are with it. So I can't expect them to stay excited about learning if I'm forcing them to be in a 1990's mentality of how they should receive education. I view it more as an exchange.

In summary, *Resistance to Technology* was a significant theme and communities who are resistant to change, technology and online learning are large in number, have been active for a long time, and have a large voice. The fears most frequently mentioned by study participants included; *fear of new ways of learning, fear of new ways of teaching, fear of change and being overwhelmed, and fear I will look like I don't know what I'm doing.* This theme is represented in diagram 6 below by a large amplitude wave with a shorter wavelength (a shorter lived community) than the fundamental and corresponding higher frequency.

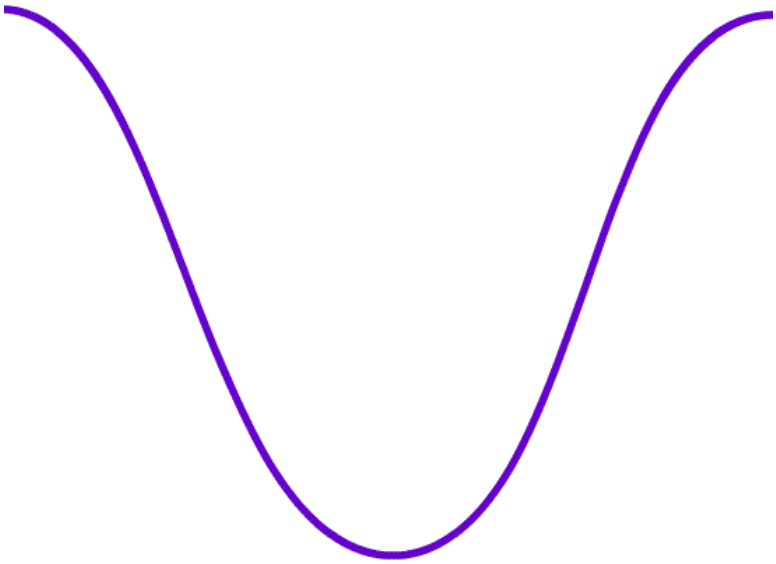


Diagram 6. Resistance to technology frequency

Professional Development

“Don’t get lost down the rabbit hole” ~ Jenny

In contrast to the fears and resistance many faculty feel toward online teaching and learning, some encounter their own *aha* moments or disorienting dilemmas openly through voluntary engagement in professional development programs, such as those offered in the VLC program supported by the CiTE. Some of these encounters, whether during workshops, training programs, or online camps and courses, can lead to transformation in the faculty member’s practice and framework of reference. As a result of these andragogical interactions, there can be profound changes in pedagogical practice. During an online discussion forum which was part of our summer 2012 one week online course in which I was a co-facilitator, a faculty member, whom I shall call Jenny, wrote a memorable thread entitled *Down the Rabbit Hole*, expressing some of these feelings,

> “My experience with LMS’s is mostly since I have been at Columbia, since fall 2006. In previous teaching positions we had either not used, or I had not noted the potential of, LMS’s. Arriving at Columbia I recognized the potential many of you have already noted for maintaining centralized repositories, building course templates etc., strategies that would ultimately free us up more for the teaching and learning aspects of education. Because I was so enthusiastic about these possibilities, a colleague suggested I apply to become an OASIS Fellow (this was pre-Moodle). I applied and became an OASIS

Fellow, which later became known as an LMS Fellow. Some called me out as an OASIS-evangelist...

The sharing of knowledge through a class like this will help increase the understanding and acceptance of these systems into our teaching and learning environment.

I recently completed 10 hours of orientation for my sabbatical project which involved watching/listening to a talking head in one corner of the screen while moving through a PowerPoint presentation. I found myself pulling sliders backwards more than once to review and listen again to a point that was new information to me. We teachers don't have slider bars built in, and we all know what it's like in a classroom when we review points for some while others metaphorically exit the room.

I know that I would appreciate both the potential for pulling the slider back and the face to face discussion of some of the more difficult points.

One drawback that people have noted is the boundary issue. I have trouble with that as well, it would be great if we could compile a list of good strategies for this so that we don't get lost (down) the rabbit hole".

A lively discussion ensued with other members of the course speculating on the opportunities openly with their colleagues. One faculty member responded to Jenny's post by saying,

"I absolutely LOVE the idea of 'pulling the slider bar back'. Even with a break, a four hour lecture can be daunting, both to give and to listen to. I know there are times I may forget a tidbit, the material is particularly difficult, or I move a little to fast. I know there are also times where the students start to "glaze over". I am already beginning to conceive of

ways to offer alternative versions of the information for a lecture on the class Moodle page; be it in text format, or as a podcast possibly. These are exciting times to be teaching!"

Voluntary vs mandatory participation

Discussion forums provide the primary meeting place in online learning communities for faculty to ask questions, make comments, contribute, share and interact with each other. They are informal gatherings that provide an important outlet for faculty who are apprehensive about change and online learning. Roger notes the following,

"I think definitely at the beginning of the roll out of the new syllabus, because we changed the Foundation (course) and that's when we brought on the VLC right from the get go. That's when we got a lot of feedback. You know it also manages a level of frustration because when you deliver something new to faculty, you know faculty approach it in different ways in different angles and there is a level of frustration that happens at the beginning. That can actually come out in that forum and we can then deal with that. We can actually start to converse and it doesn't get bottled up. Which if you're trying to get a new program going, you want to have points where people can release their frustration and feel again like they're part of the process."

The online learning community built around Roger's department's multi-section foundation course was intended to be a way to ensure that students were getting similar information, although because faculty ultimately have control over their own courses and content, Roger points out this could not be assured in all cases. The VLC program and

constituent online learning communities are informal places for professional faculty development and participation in them is typically voluntary. In the foundation course online learning community, however, this is not the case. Participation is mandatory. Roger points out that, from an administrator's standpoint, this has its advantages and disadvantages.

> "Yeah I think I mean the idea of that is the VLC helps us keep everything over a multi-sectioned course on track, I think. So you know with having so many different personalities within the Foundation we have a wonderful sort of rich level of experience of faculty. But there's a certain point where that becomes almost a problem in that when delivering sort of multi-sectioned courses you need to have some, not a guarantee but some way of making sure that students are getting similar information. Not the same, but similar information. So by the time they come through the Foundation, we know that they've got the same knowledge base or similar knowledge base."

Within the foundation course learning community, many become transformed in a way that empowers them to take the shared knowledge and mold it with their own to create a new and better way to teach; one which they may have been initially hesitant to embrace. Roger goes on to say,

> "There's people who come up and say 'I didn't think this would ever be of any value, but I'm actually using it in my other course now.' That's great. Once again, you just want more and more. And that's where they can actually, without the multi-sectioned courses, where we've got specialized courses that might be a one-off course or that might only have two sections or so on like that and the faculty are pretty close together anyway sort

> of thing. They just have full rein of the site. We don't do anything really except give them a template for their syllabus and that's it. And they just construct it."

But the issue of voluntary participation is important from an andragogical perspective as well as in the eyes of many faculty members. Christine sees the issue of voluntary participation as being important for professional faculty development.

> "I'd say it's not ruling with an iron fist. It's not a command and control. It's not an outward belief in "I don't believe we collaborate". It's in, I think, leading by example. I think it's in recognizing that we are all leaders whether we are in a positional leadership that comes with the title and authority or whether we're personally a leader. I think it's that individual commitment to moving from whence we came to the future. The future isn't out there, the future is here… Instead of saying wow we're so behind in our technological approaches or we're not prepared yet from a distance learning standpoint or whatever, I'm trying to say ok let's meet the world where the world is."

Voluntary versus mandatory participation is not a black and white issue. There are many shades in between purely voluntary and purely mandatory faculty development. For example, while Roger's multi-section online learning community is mandatory to be enrolled in, participation is not. Faculty can post to the forums, participate in discussions and review materials at their own pace. The mandatory feature is that they must use the same syllabus in order to, as Roger says, keep the course objectives and content to the students across all sections the same. While some faculty may object to having the syllabi prescribed at a department level for a foundation course, many do not. In fact, I have not encountered one faculty member in that department that raised that objection. On the other hand, I have spoken

to many faculty members who actually appreciate the ability to come into a course and have a syllabus and content ready to go. Especially if they can guide the course in their own way, albeit in a structured sort of improvisation. But while I have not encountered faculty who object to this, no doubt there are those who do and who see the mandatory nature of forced enrollment and use of a common syllabus as restrictive.

Another example of mandatory participation not being clear cut, is that, as part of the VLC, LMS, and Online Instructional Fellows program, we require that faculty take an online course before they can teach or facilitate an online course. However, we feel this is more common sense than anything and, while the online courses we offer have set assignments for completing the course, all participants can use their sandbox sites to complete the courses in a variety of ways and can participate as much as they wish in online discussion forums that are ongoing throughout the courses. However, the online learning communities that operate at Columbia are predominantly voluntary and informal places of learning. They are often established by departments and faculty themselves to create a safe and self-sustained online environment for a variety of purposes.

In my experience taking online classes through outside online training providers for my own professional development, I have encountered faculty who were being forced to take an online course or to be a part of a virtual community as a requirement of their employment. In these situations, faculty resistance can be fierce and harmful to the learning environment to the point of distraction for other more willing learners. Indeed, I have occasionally taught online faculty training courses at Columbia where one or two faculty members have been pressured to take an online course by their department or someone in their department. It becomes very

apparent to a facilitator when a participant is in your course against their will. They may become disruptive, argumentative, and even try to turn others against the facilitators. However, these micro-resistances can also become learning and teaching moments. At worst, the faculty member simply "stops out"[2] of the course. At best, however, the faculty member actually encounters a disorienting dilemma and realizes that their fear and resistance to this new way of teaching and learning may be just fear of the unknown, or any of the other types of fears mentioned at the beginning of chapter five, *Resistance to Technology*. Such transformative learning moments are transfixing and sometimes these faculty go on to become great online facilitators. I have had situations like that. They are moments you never forget.

What makes learning communities active and vibrant?

Craig sees the question of professional faculty development as being highly dynamic with institutions at different stages of preparing their faculty for new "habits" of learning and teaching with technology. In fact, much of my interview with Craig centered around the concept of habits of teaching and learning in the new information age, without any direct reference to either Mezirow's habits of mind in transformative learning theory or Siemen's principles of connectivism. Craig sees these habits for use of online resources as still forming, especially in higher education and that some institutions are way ahead of others in providing faculty with more resources. I asked him what makes some learning communities more active than others:

> "…some of the conditions are that the, we'll say facilitators, the teachers, the people in the teacher role in the VLC, are active and actively committed to keeping information up

[2] The term used for dropping out of an online course.

to date, relevant and timely. Up to date and timely being it's needed when it's needed and that it's current information, right? And then another condition is that the other participants, whether they be in the teacher role or other roles are also, also see that resource as a place to find the information that they need. So I guess part of that has to do with there's been some education in terms of helping people who are going to participate in this dynamic in the Virtual Learning Community, helping them understand what they will find there and then enabling them to build the habits to seek out that information in the Virtual Learning Community. Those two conditions seem to be core, I think, to what makes a Virtual Learning Community successful and/or vibrant, active."

The importance of discussion forums in the VLC program

Online discussion forums present one of the most challenging, yet rewarding experiences of online learning as well as online communities of practice. It could be argued that an online discussion forum is the locus for faculty development in the VLC program. Over half (55%) of all respondents to the online questionnaire listed online discussion as one of the most useful features in the VLC and to their own teaching.

From a management standpoint, discussion forums are a practical way for faculty to engage in dialogue with each other, to offer new ideas and share experiences. Discussion forums exist in other online communities of practice as well. Outside of the Columbia LMS, faculty interact with other professionals in their respective disciplines and often in discussion forums. I myself participate in many discussion forums, but few as rich and rewarding, and in some cases, even confrontational, as the faculty discussion forums with the VLC program and LMS online training courses.

The best way to describe the vitality and importance of faculty exchange in an online discussion forum is to post an actual exchange that took place in an online Moodle camp summer 2012 facilitated by yours truly. A discussion forum thread entitled:

“Discussion forums - an idea for using readings for discussion”

by EC - Wednesday, June 27, 2012, 5:17 PM

One of the things I'm thinking about these days is how to support students' 'reading' of texts (whether they are written, visual, video, etc.
Years ago I took a workshop in the CTE about guiding readers through texts. We did an exercise in which one reading was assigned to three different groups within the workshop. The text described a house - this many floors, these entrances, windows of a certain size, appliances, flooring, the nearness of the neighbors, etc.
Out of earshot of one another, each group was asked to read the text from a different point of view. One group read as realtors, another as police detectives investigating a robbery, another as potential home-buyers. We each read and discussed within our group what we gleaned from the text.
Then, the groups gathered and shared their findings. It was truly remarkable the differences between what each group got out of the reading! It was like we'd read different documents.
The point I remember about this exercise was the value of guiding students when they read. Let them know what you think is important about a text. Give them questions to consider as they read the text. Help them focus on what you want them to take away from the experience. When I've been able to do this, classroom discussions have been richer. I hope to apply this technique in my forums.

by WH - Wednesday, June 27, 2012, 9:19 PM

I primarily use forums for reading responses in art history courses. I give prompting questions for each reading to help students focus. There is a little bit of redundancy toward the end of the posting, but I actually think this is beneficial. I ask students to distinguish their thinking and voice from their classmates. This improves the discussion in class as well.
Once they get the hang of it, you can also ask students to pose questions to each other, either for class discussion or within the forum posts, or both! This is a terrific way to build collective study materials!!!

by JG - Thursday, June 28, 2012, 6:04 PM

I love that exercise, we should try that sometime!
I usually do provide reflective prompts for readings. We should create a repository to share some of these also. But I’ve never thought about the different perspectives possibilities.
Although I have asked my students in digital practices to divide into groups to discuss Benjamin’s Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction with each group taking a different point of

view: one group is the Luddites, one group is the Techies and one group is sort of John Q Public in relation to the ideas of art and reproducibility in the digital age.

by DN - Thursday, June 28, 2012, 7:13 PM

You guys are really onto something here. I have spoken to L about creating a best practices App. Perhaps the repository you speak of could be an interactive database of reflective practice and activities? I like where this thread is going.

by AB - Friday, June 29, 2012, 3:34 AM

Yeah, I think allowing students a chance to be the guiding force can be beneficial for everyone. Sometimes showing students that their perspective is unique and that their life experiences and what they know can be brought to the table and influence what and how we read texts can be an extremely empowering moment for them as students (and therefore for us as educators). Being able to distinguish what we think and why is a huge part of developing critical thinking skills.

by EC - Friday, June 29, 2012, 2:24 PM

Good ideas. A workshop would be awesome, and and app.. . how very 21st century!
Joan, I think the idea of having the students as a group take different perspectives on a text is so similar, and yet different from the idea of them actually reading an analyzing the text together. I think both of these practices would be interesting and really useful. The way you approach it works better with longer texts, I would think. Although I suppose that there would be a way to break a long text into smaller pieces for a group analysis process.
I think some of that sharing could possibly be done in a forum, but somehow I also feel like the energy of sitting and thinking together is also valuable.
Ali, I really agree with your point about the importance of helping students feel the value of their unique perspectives, and helping them to bring that knowledge to the practice of thinking critically!

In summary, *Professional Development* represents faculty who, in most cases, voluntarily seek out programs to improve their technology and online skills either through the VLC program, CiTE, or other programs outside the Columbia community. In some cases, faculty are required by departments to attend training programs or workshops. Professional development can lead to new "habits" of learning and teaching with technology. Faculty often learn these new habits from watching their peers or learning from their peers during online camps, courses and, in particular, discussion forums. These forums are an important part of the VLC program with a majority of faculty listing this feature as one of the most useful features of the LMS. Whether voluntary or not, faculty exchange of ideas in an andragogical setting is a vital and dynamic way for transformative learning to occur. This theme is represented in diagram 7 below as a medium amplitude (moderate number of participants) and high frequency (high diversity) theme.

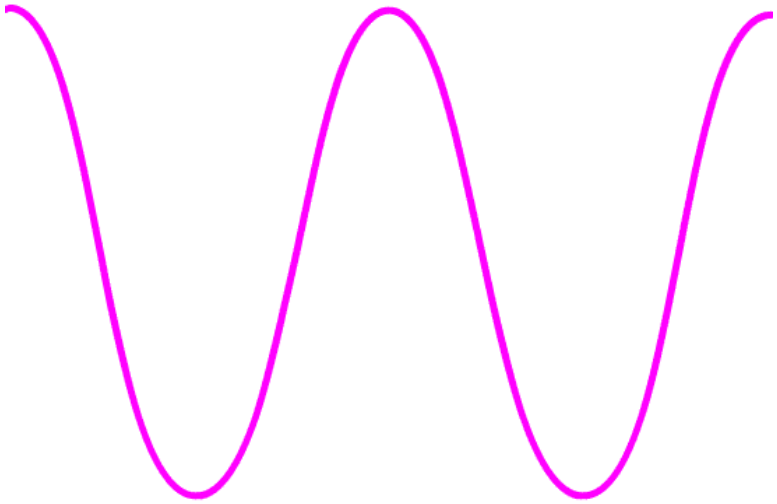


Diagram 7. Professional development frequency

Creating knowledge

“It’s like going to another country” ~ Jenny

Another major theme that emerged in the study was the creation of knowledge in the VLC program and the constituent online learning communities. Siemens (2005) first principle of connectivism states that “Learning and knowledge rests in diversity of opinions.” The VLC program facilitates diversity of opinion through faculty coming together and bringing their diverse experiences and connections to these online learning communities and discussion forums. According to Jenny,

> “It’s actually great. It’s sort of like going to another country sometimes where people have different cultural values so there is this capacity to be exposed to things that you wouldn’t necessarily butt up against in your normal orbit. You’re exposed to ideas from other orbits and that’s really a great thing. It’s sometimes then how do you participate in the conversation when it’s in an orbit that you’re not familiar with? How is what you have to say relevant within that orbit?”

Jenny is a risk taker and, as long as I have known her, she has had a penchant for experimentation with technology, her art, and, needless to say, any place at which they intersect. She is an artist/activist and reaches out to whomever, wherever her art and ideas take her. Jenny always expressed surprise to me that more faculty at Columbia, “…were not taking advantage of the potential that the learning management system (offers)…” She was, “… shocked that that was not taken advantage of more globally in the community.” Moreover, Jenny uses technology to connect with others and explore the unknown even if it is unstable and

unreliable. She regularly attends workshops, trainings and online tutorials to diversify her skill set and stay current with both technology and like-minded communities. In so many ways, Jenny is the embodiment of the connectivist educator. She says,

> "And I think the word *technology*, it can refer to so many things so, for example, in my artwork, I use Photoshop. I use Illustrator. I use Illustrator to run software to use the laser cutter and I'm going to be learning how to use the [3]CNC mill to do three dimensional forms that are not just straight xy cuts but have xyz cuts, and different things like that. I am pushing myself to learn those things as a visual artist who makes objects and makes stuff. I have attended the U of I Chicago computer science for high school teachers and I went to a 2-day workshop which had to do with using [4]Arduinos and [5]Processing and how to use Arduinos to make interactive fabric forms that would do stuff and so you're using it for controlling and things like that."

Another risk taking educator Sandra, reflected on how fast knowledge is changing in the information age and the impact it is having on teachers and learners.

> "But I was thinking about just this idea of the traditional education model kind of being like the banking method, like an expert stands in front of the room and dumps knowledge into all of these empty vessels. And philosophically, that is against everything that I stand for. Like this is where I quote Paul Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* forever. But I've always kind of thought that that feels so wrong to me because all of the learners in

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[3] See Terms and concepts used in this paper (Appendix i)

[4] See Terms and concepts used in this paper (Appendix i)

[5] See Terms and concepts used in this paper (Appendix i)

> the room are experts in something and we're all here to share in the knowledge and connect with it in different ways. …Like it's happening so quickly. And so now it needs to be more like instead of teaching the knowledge it's teaching how to be constantly learning the knowledge. And those are two different skill sets. And this one over here, the teaching the knowledge, that's like the banking I will memorize what you say and I will spit it back to you. Not only is that now wrong philosophically, but it's wrong in so far as how information is passed."

Educating in the cloud

Knowledge is changing so rapidly, that we do not have the time, in many cases, to stop for a moment and prepare a written manual, or instructions, let alone a lesson plan, before we have to re-write the manual, change the instructions and think of a new lesson. Technical instructions are, therefore, more and more a part of the cloud realm for educators. In the VLC, educators can connect to other communities who exist to develop specific materials and share them on the Internet, now re-marketed as the "cloud" by Microsoft, Apple, and others. But educators have been educating in the cloud for some time now, only calling it the Internet, or web, and connected educators belong to an ever growing and changing network of educational technologists, theorists and cloud based communities. It is within this new information ecology that the VLC program has flourished and formed an identity of its own within the Columbia community of faculty and professionals.

Balancing networks and online communities

“Swimming in unfamiliar waters” ~ Sandra

Yet boundaries do exist between the educator in the classroom and social media, for example, even though many educators use both extensively in the information age. While I will discuss social media more in the section on Political and Social change, Sandra alludes to some of the properties and limitations of online learning communities that exists within the so-called *walled garden* of an institutional LMS.

> “Moodle is the place to run a class. I feel like Facebook needs to be an extension of Moodle in some way. And I’m still kind of swimming in unfamiliar waters on how to find the balance between the two. Because last semester the Facebook page got so active that Moodle, people just stopped going.”

For many faculty, being a part of multiple networks, whether blogging, tweeting, posting discussions to forums, or pictures to Pinterest and being part of many communities is not just a social phenomena, it is a professional and artistic medium, like any other, or perhaps more important than any other in the information age. It is a maxim for many 21st century educators. According to Sandra,

> “Many of the successes that I’ve had in my professional career have happened because of social media and connectivity. I had a piece last fall in the Best American Essays and the editor of that piece found my work online. I think that somebody shared it with her. And so that is huge to me and I think it’s something our students need to be engaged

with. And I think that that's the reason why they come here. That's the reason why they're coming here to school."

So how are faculty members within departments reacting to the notion of collaborating to put together these lessons essentially combining their knowledge, a whole new knowledge as a group? Are we creating a knowledge in these departments that's separate from what individuals have? Is it a group knowledge? Christine seems to think so. She says that,

"I think we're creating, I don't necessarily like the term intellectual property because we don't own it, but I think we're creating more shared knowledge and more shared opportunities to treat curriculum development as a living organism, as this ongoing expansive organism, that it's alive."

But for Robert, everything comes down to the individual. Interestingly, during our discussion and somewhat to my surprise, while still absorbed in the ongoing debate over connectivist principles and an evangelist for promoting online occupation by fellow faculty members, he brought the discussion convincingly back to the power of a single student/teacher bond.

"If you can build a community, great. It's not as high a priority for me as it used to be. I know that we sort of share the Connectivist theory of learning, but I wouldn't make that a sort of prime element. So Connectivism being sort of a sub-species of Constructivist learning. I get what those guys are doing. I get it. I took their year long class that was so vague and interesting. Very interesting, I learned a lot from it. But in these classes I don't, its not a core skill for me in the way it used to be. Because what I do think is its a one to one relationship. That's the intimacy."

In summary, *Creating Knowledge* represents the way that faculty work together in online communities and networks to build shared information and knowledge as a virtual learning community. In the information age, what we know today, will be different tomorrow, and through online communities and networks, faculty are able to access information whenever and wherever they need it, provided the necessary technology is available. Education in the cloud is becoming more of a common practice and the boundaries that existed between social media and official academic learning sites are continuing to break down. Group knowledge is critical for survival of programs, but interaction between individuals is still the most important event even in the information age. *Creating Knowledge* is represented in diagram 8 by a low amplitude (as a smaller group actually participates in this type of learning community), and high frequency wave as the group is more complex and diverse.

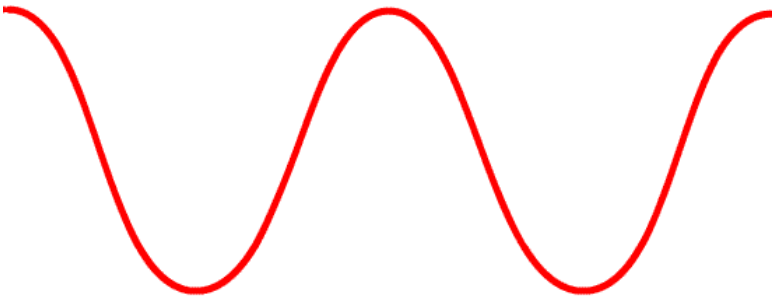


Diagram 8. Creating knowledge frequency

Summary of chapter five

In chapter five, I have discussed three themes that emerged from my research. *Resistance to Technology, Professional Development*, and *Creation of Knowledge*. These three themes combined with the fundamental frequency of the Columbia culture discussed in chapter three, form a set of resonating frequencies I call *perfect partials* that push outward from the individual or online learning community and create *waves of transformation* that resonate elsewhere in other departments or the campus community at large.

Although *Resistance to Technology* may seem counter-productive to learning new technology and adapting to online teaching and learning, it is actually this resistance that creates much of the energy in the RF model. *Professional Development* can lead to new "habits" of teaching and learning. While most participation in the VLC program is voluntary, there are exceptions, although the terms voluntary and mandatory are rarely absolutes. In many cases, mandatory participation can lead to an increase in resistance to learning and behavior detrimental to learning environments. Occasionally, however, these situations can be turned into transformative learning experiences. In the *Creating Knowledge* section of this chapter, I showed that faculty come together in online communities and networks to create shared knowledge. The boundaries that exist between academic web sites like Moodle and social media are beginning to break down. However, some social media sites are becoming less used by students and faculty while others are now the rage. While group knowledge is crucial to how faculty teach and learn in the information age, especially through online learning communities of

practice and social media, the interaction between one teacher and one student is still the most important event in the educative process.

Chapter six: Strange overtones of consonance and dissonance

In this chapter I will continue my discussion of the main themes that emerged from the study, including *Community Building*, *Giving Voice to All*, and *Political and Social Change*. Combined, these three themes make up a complex set of frequencies that represent the upper overtones of the RF model. They include findings that are at times consonant and harmonious with the campus community and at other times dissonant and troubling, yet they make up the unique nature of the VLC program at Columbia.

Community building

…more new ways of learning

While the VLC program is made up of many diverse members and online learning communities, they share the ability to create and nurture a community of practice that can be, at the very least useful for a single purpose and, in some cases, even transformative for faculty and staff and their practice. Regardless of how faculty are participating in the VLC program, they are experiencing new ways of learning that for most, take them into uncharted territory and new relationships with their peers and administration. Some of the reasons online learning communities are created include:

- Online training sites and courses
- Departmental teaching and learning communities
- Multi-section course communities
- Fellowship and research sites
- Committees and working groups

In most cases, as stated previously in the section on Professional Development, participation is voluntary and takes place informally. In the case of online training sites and courses, some sites may include self-directed learning activities while others are facilitated by faculty members, fellows, or CiTE staff. For most participants in the program, they will enter and engage in an online community when it is active, or they need to find some piece of information, or they have something to contribute to the larger community. There needs to be a reason and/or incentive to enter an online learning community, let alone participate in one. This is one big difference between an institutional VLC and social media, for example.

Collaborative learning

In one example of a multi-section course community, faculty, staff and administrators designed, redesigned and continue to redesign in an heuristic manner, the learning community with positive results. In addition, at least in this learning community, there is an increased level of collaboration. Roger describes it this way,

> "…it just allows our faculty to actually stay in contact with each other and grow a community of collaboration on the syllabus. So that everyone's guaranteed that they've got a voice or at least the opportunity to voice their opinion about what we're doing. Our syllabus is sort of, it is structured. It is sort of like a, each faculty member runs off the same syllabus. And so it's super important when you've got a group of 15 academics that they do feel like they can actually contribute to something that is set in a way per semester."

Not only can online learning communities help bring faculty together for shared purposes and collaboration, but, ideally, they help keep them from growing apart. For administrators, it is important that faculty not only learn from others, but that they stay in touch, particularly in multi-section courses, and that they have the ability and incentive to want to work together toward a

better way of teaching the syllabus, or, if necessary, changing it. The worst case scenario, and one that has been prevalent in some of the departments used in this study, is that faculty become isolated, uninformed with contemporary theory, practice and technology, and defensive about their teaching practice. Bringing faculty back together with a shared vision and skilled in the use of contemporary technology and software is difficult to do without an online learning community. Without a common online site for sharing and discussion and experimentation, faculty can easily become isolated. Roger says,

> "And then you get to the end of maybe several years and you've realized that everyone's teaching something completely different, you know. And that's happened before within our department. So it's a very good way of keeping track of all that, I think."

Craig also sees the VLC program as a "much more collaborative model" where faculty and staff can address shared challenges without lengthy meetings and in an informal and asynchronous setting, where members of the community can take the time to consider their own solutions in the context of other community members. He says that,

> "…the VLC has again and again been a solution for us in terms of communication, facilitation, documentation, and then ultimately faculty development…"

Faculty can learn collaboratively as well through sharing of information, skill sets, the use of LMS features, and simply engaging in dialogue. Sometimes just seeing how others handle a problem online or use technology to solve problems can prompt faculty to connect to each other and collaborate in learning experiences. As Jenny says,

> "I can set things up pretty well, I don't always carry them through as well as I would like. I think for example specifically with Moodle I think about the grade book and I think about setting those things up and all of that. But then I look to somebody like Robert and I think, 'Oh wow if I could just do that sort of thing.'… And I look at somebody else's class and I think his stuff looks good, it looks cool. If I was a student I would much rather

experience a course page that looks like that than a course page that looks like some of the other course pages. So I learn from people what not to do also."

Transformative learning and helping others

Some faculty members use the VLC as a way of reaching out for help with using the technology itself. As a VLC member, Christine is proud of the fact that she overcame her own fears of technology in what could be described as a transformative learning experience, and now offers help to her peers who are struggling just as she did,

"You know what I flat out was scared to death by this thing called Moodle two years ago and holy smokes I'm a Moodle fellow now, how did that happen? I just got in the sandbox and started playing. And I use language like its like playing in a sandbox, of I'm going right to the shovel and the bucket and I'm going to play. And so the more I played around with this the more I learned let me help you. Let me meet you where you are with it. And I had a conversation this morning with a faculty member who was struggling, struggling, struggling with grade book and in an interaction I recognized that he was viewing it and he was making it harder than it needed to be."

Obstacles to community building and collaboration

A couple of study participants pointed out during interviews that online communities have a number of consistently active users and consistently inactive users. Speaking about one particular learning community, Christine says that,

"…you asked me how people are receiving this vision I would almost say an 80/20 mode. I'm excited to say that 80% of the people are willing if invited and if shown that its actually an easy way to communicate and converse and document and communicate in this way versus sit in your office and generate a lot of activity that isn't then replicated. So I think 80% of the people are very excited but don't always then know how to keep

> that collaboration going. I'd say the 20%, and I don't know that its really 80/20, I'm just hypothetically going with that 80/20 rule, but I'd say a smaller percentage of people come from an older school mindset that the academician's role is to lecture and students receive and it's my way not necessarily a collaborative process of bringing our academic institution into the 21st century. So I would go on record saying this; I am hopeful that that attitude and that view of academia is a dying breed, or a retiring breed not a dying breed."

Robert agrees with the 80/20 numbers split but thinks it is the reverse, where 20% is actually doing 80% of the work, as in the Pareto principle. He sees this as one of the main challenges to the VLC program and online communities in general.

> "And so the 20% of people do 80% of the work and 80% of the people do 20% of the work. And in forums that's often true, 20% of the people do the posts and it would be ok if 80% of the people looked at the posts and thought about it but that's not what happens. Its like 20% of the people are talking to each other. And the other 80% are like I'm glad they got that cause I don't need it. I think that's what's happening. And so it skews in that sort of way. So the challenge in VLCs for faculty, not for students, is to broaden the participation."

Christine sees ongoing challenges for faculty and administrators from other areas as well. For many, a persistent culture of suspicion, fear of becoming redundant, giving up one's unique ideas, and independence as a teacher, can work against the concept of community building and the sharing of ideas and practice. Nevertheless, she says that,

> "I believe that the tides are changing in the way in which we view academia and more and more people that have a collaborative approach to sharing learning ideas and willing to learn together and build together I think our students will face a much richer, more robust learning experience."

The cyclical nature of online learning communities

While some of these communities are operational throughout the year, many are cyclical and, not surprisingly, find their highest activity at the beginning of the semester. One VLC program Fellow, Kendra Hay (2013), conducted research into a specific multi-section online learning community within her department. She conducted her research over the first six weeks of the Fall 2013 semester studying the VLC activity of five adjuncts and one full time instructor.

Hay's project assessment stated the following, "Whether or not VLC-WFM met its stated goal—'to encourage experimentation and aid faculty in developing more interactive and meaningful learning communities in their online courses'—is unclear. During this six-week course, instructor participation tapered. As indicated below (Table 1), week one generated sufficiently strong numbers. After that, instructor participation dropped and remained low. Anecdotally, it seems that lack of time was a contributing factor in this. Time constraints were indicated both in email correspondence with the fellowship recipient and in survey results" (p. 3).

The following table (Table 1.) shows the level of participation of the faculty members in an online discussion forum in the VLC over the six week period.

Table 1.

	Threads	Replies	Total
Week 1	6	6	12
Week 2-3	5	6	11
Week 4	1	2	3
Week 5	2	3	5
Week 6	1	0	1

Participation varies for a number of reasons, including, as Hay noted, time constraints. But do online learning communities have specific life cycles of their own? I asked Craig whether

he had any thoughts on the subject of VLC activity and why, despite similar content and purpose, some online communities were more active than others. He replied that,

> "The VLCs that I have seen stayed the most active and the most consistently active are those that are focused on say providing both information and a space for interaction that are not necessarily bound to a timeline like a faculty development grant process. The reason why the faculty development grant VLC is active twice a year is because that is when the grant timeline calls for this activity. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Because again the documentation is one of the most valuable aspects of doing all of this work within the Virtual Learning Community. A different example would be a department based VLC that is around a specific course where faculty members are posting assignments, where they are sharing ideas, where they are asking questions and where those questions are being answered by facilitators, right?"

But what is it that gives these communities a level of energy that enables them to engage in vibrant discussions and challenge one another? Apart from being just committee meeting places and departmental repositories, many of these online communities seem to take on a life of their own that sparks with a flurry of excitement and interest and then, just as quickly departs, leaving the discussion and ideas behind for others to challenge at a later time.

Craig repeatedly refers to new habits of learning that are being forged in the information ecology, and he also sees a difference in how time and space are measured in online learning communities compared to face to face environments. Because participants are often working in asynchronous discussion forums, wikis, or online journals,

> "… there is a different kind of interactivity that is possible in these environments. And I feel like there's just more space, and by space I mean time and energy and I can think about it and I can ride the train home and then I can go take a nap and then I can come

back to it tomorrow morning and say 'Oh I just thought of this.' And then I can come back to it three days later and add another thing to it."

And then there is the potential to come back to the VLC at a much later time, as online learning communities contain discussions, debates, dialogue, arguments and decisions that can save future faculty and administrators the misfortune of having to re-invent the wheel. Roger says,

"The best part of building a VLC site is that you can store information that you can access anywhere at any time. This helps with remembering details about subject matter especially if you are teaching several courses. Plus you don't have to reinvent course content from scratch which allows more time for finding updated content."

But while it is clear that communities within the VLC program seem to have cycles of activity depending on what their purpose is and the needs of the community members, the fact is that as of the writing of this paper, the number of online learning communities in the Columbia Moodle site stands at almost 300, with 50 of them being actively used by about 700 users within the last month (see table 2 below). In fact, I receive a request to create a new site every week it seems, and so online communities now continue to grow across the campus for all sorts of uses and apart from the offer of any stipend or fellowship. They have become a cultural phenomenon at Columbia College Chicago.

Table 2: Most active online learning communities at Columbia

Most active VLC communities		
Activity level	total # of online communities	total # of users
High use within past 7 days	17	240
High use within past 30 days	33	463
High to moderate use within past 60 days	23	190
Total	73	893

In summary, *Community Building* identifies many of the sites where online learning takes place, including training sites and courses, departmental teaching and learning communities, multi-section course communities, fellowship and research sites, and committee and working group sites. Community building includes collaborative learning, helping others, transformative learning, and working together to overcome obstacles, fears, and to share ideas. Online learning communities are cyclical in nature often beginning with a lot of activity and becoming less active over time, depending on their purpose. Despite this, however, learning communities are resilient at Columbia and hundreds of faculty members and staff participate in them on a regular basis. *Community Building* is represented in diagram 9 below by a high amplitude (large number of online communities trying to accomplish community building tasks) and moderately high frequency (diverse interests).

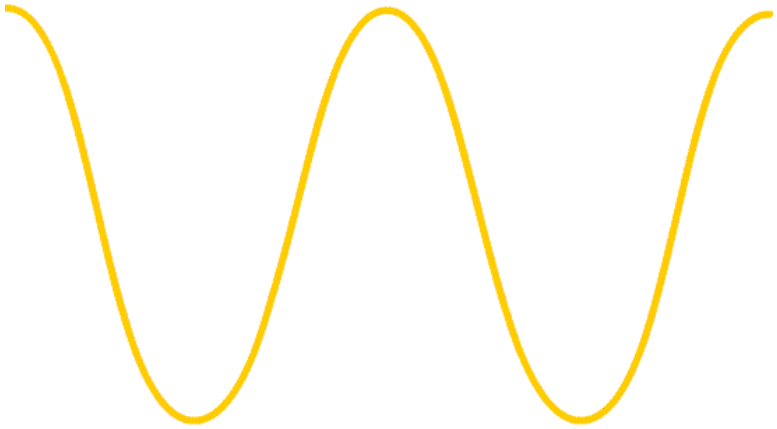


Diagram 9: Community building frequency

Giving voice to all

With its emphasis on community, the VLC program has focused on bringing groups of like minded faculty and administrators together for shared purposes, and, notably different than bringing students together in an online class, for example. As several participants observed, when you post an assignment in an online class with traditional students, it is their coursework, so they have to do it. In contrast, you can't do that in a faculty based VLC. You can't force faculty to participate, nor should you even try. Many faculty, not just the author, are familiar at least in part with the principles of effective adult education and even andragogy as theorized by Malcolm Knowles (1980). So most faculty online communities at Columbia are voluntary, facilitated in a learner-centered way and much participation is driven by the faculty's desire to improve themselves in a professional way for the benefit of themselves, their colleagues, and even the institution. However, the significance of the one, giving voice to individuals, and the importance of diverse points of view also emerged as a significant finding in this study.

The VLC is a safe place

"I hope that there's no right or wrong" ~ Robert

A recurring theme during my interviews was the notion of online communities and, in particular, discussion forums, as being places where people could voice their opinions, be heard, feel safe, and not feel pressured to respond under any duress. According to Robert,

> "So what I think happens in the online environment is that you have some safety built in which is people don't have to necessarily think on their feet. They don't have to feel the pressure of oh I've got to be really smart here because that guy just said something really smart. And that it's easier to create a safe environment because in a face to face

> class or even in a group of people like faculty you would say "it's ok, if your shy" you're already pointing out things that are just aggravating the problem. So in a Virtual Learning Community I think that holds true also. Which is it's ok to have an opinion and it's ok to have a brief opinion. You don't really have to get into it. And I hope that there's no right or wrong. That should be the key to any kind of discussion anyway. That's the nature of discussion. We're discussing. If I discuss and you say I'm wrong then we're not discussing any more we're arguing. And that's ok too. But that's different than discussion. So I think that its a safe place to try out ideas and solutions in the way we use VLCs we're talking about our practice usually, how to do things in different ways you know its back and forth. So I think its a pretty safe environment."

One of the clear advantages of the VLC program and its emphasis on not only allowing, but encouraging and facilitating dialogue in online discussion forums is that faculty, in particular, have an opportunity to give careful consideration to their input in at least a cooperative way, and in many cases, according to interviewees, a truly collaborative way. In one multi-course online community where enrollment is mandatory, but participation is voluntary, faculty take the opportunity to have their voices and opinions heard. According to Roger,

> "Maybe once, twice a semester we have training sessions or get togethers so that we can look at the syllabus and so on. But between there it's 15 weeks of minimal contact with your colleagues. So with the forums, that actually opened up the possibility for people to have conversations as the program's rolling. We document down problems with the program or issues that arise during the semester. And they can have a conversation through that forum. It actually encourages people to have a voice, I think. Rather than sometimes in a meeting some people will be very quiet. But on the forum they're actually quite vocal. And we've always presented the forum as open discussion, as something that they can put down whatever they want, you know. And then we

> actually use that as a way of assessing the program, the success of it and what changes we're going to do the next semester."

Sandra in her work in faculty development at the CiTE sees an important parallel between the experience that faculty are gaining in the VLC program and their own practice in the classroom. It is, in essence, a pure form of faculty development that starts with a disorienting dilemma for some and ultimately results in critical reflection and a new way of seeing things, in particular, how we facilitate our own classroom spaces and give them a chance to be heard. In discussing how her face to face classes diverge from her online experiences in the VLC program as well as social media external to the campus Internet environment she says that,

> "…when I first started to work with online forums, it was really eye opening to see sort of the explosion of that student who wasn't necessarily involving themselves in the classroom activity because of all sorts of different fears and comfort levels and maybe this has to do with gender and race and orientation and all the different reasons, all the different roadblocks, that that individual in my classroom has had to fight through in the past and what I represent as a teacher, and certainly one that talks a lot. And how do I need to shut up and listen too, I think is a whole other part of this conversation."

It is indeed an experience for many educators to participate in asynchronous dialogue with colleagues and to not be able to dominate the discussion but have to learn new ways to learn and to develop personal, as well as professional skills. But for faculty, the experience can be intimidating at times and not without risks.

Becoming a good citizen in the information age

As faculty start to model their own face to face, hybrid, and online teaching based upon the experiences they have in the VLC, they begin to reflect on how they collaborate,

communicate and work with others online and outside of their professional setting as well. They begin to see there are new ways of learning and teaching and becoming what Sandra calls a *good citizen* in the information age. She believes that,

> "The classroom is not just a place to give the specific knowledge and skill set of my discipline, it's a knowledge and skill set of how we move through this world and how we work with other people and how we connect and what we want our work to mean. And to me that's about being a good citizen and I think that there are …a whole other set of considerations when you're dealing with things online."

Indeed, along with providing a space for voices to be heard and encouraging discussion and dialogue and open reflection, comes the responsibility of being not just polite, respectful and sympathetic to other voices, but understanding that, without the reference of having a face to look at, or body language to watch, messages and comments can be mistaken and lead to detours in our discourse. So the VLC program provides not only a learning space for faculty to practice their good citizenry online, but to see where some of the pitfalls and land-mines of online teaching are buried. Sandra provides a great example of the inherent dangers:

> "So like if we're sitting in a class face to face, and let's say you make some comment and I can either say "Do you really feel that way?" or I can say "UGH! Do you REALLY FEEL THAT WAY??!!!?" and it's the same words. It's the same sentence structure written on the page or typed into Moodle but it is a completely different setup for what's about to happen next. Like if I say "Wow, do you really feel that way?" Then we're going to have a conversation and you're going to teach me about how you feel. If I say "DO YOU REALLY FEEL THAT WAY!!??!" Then we're going to fight. Right? I would like to teach in the classroom that the former is the way to go. You know "Do you really feel that way?" just thinking about our tone of voice and how we say things."

However, despite the emphasis on community, Robert reminds us that whether participating in a face to face, hybrid, flipped or online class, or VLC, the most important relationship is that of the teacher/learner. He says,

> "I think that's what happens in online courses, it's really one to one. And in a face to face class it's not one to one. So in terms of building community in online learning, … I've really changed my thinking on that. I do think it's one to one. If you can build a community, great. It's not as high a priority for me as it used to be."

Diversity in the VLC program

"Diversity makes everything better" ~ Craig

Faculty online communities that make up the VLC program at Columbia largely represent the faculty body. While this study includes a representative sample of age, gender and teaching experience, sexual orientation was not part of the questionnaire. Participation in the study by a more diverse ethnic group was disappointing. According to some interviewees, who were all white, diversity in the VLC was not an important factor in the functioning or interaction with the VLC program, however, to others, it was. Craig believes it avoids a deference to a common (predominantly white, male, heterosexual) voice and goes on to say that,

> "I think diversity makes everything better. And I don't mean to be flip about it. But I feel like the more experiences, the more distinct and diverse the experiences of the individuals who are participating in any conversation, the more vibrant, the more robust, the more complete, the more … what I see when folks are not all from the same gender, not all from the same racial or ethnic makeup, where there is difference within a group, there seems to be a natural tendency to, and I don't know what the reason behind this is, but a natural tendency to put forth not always opposing views, but distinct views. Alright?

> And I mean I do think that in general women and men will read something and respond to it slightly differently. I do think in general people of different races and ethnicities or classes or gender orientations, right? will respond to things in different ways. And I think that the VLC can facilitate that exchange because again you don't have to find a time that everybody's going to be in the room together, right? … I would say it's (diversity) critical. There's always something missing if we are only talking to or listening to people who look like us, sound like us, come from similar backgrounds"

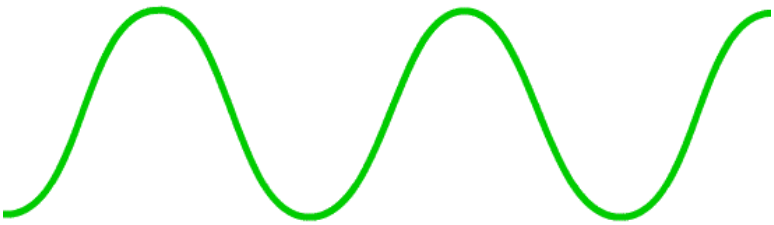
Particularly in the cultural context of Columbia's art/activism heritage, administrators like Roger recognize the importance of diversity in providing equal voice and differing perspectives of the community at large. He says that,

> "…it's sort of that idea of the faculty, the staff, all learning from everyone else's interests, and the VLC allows you to do that. At least it allows you to capture, or at least present the diversity of the group…Definitely when we come to the end of the semester we have our review meetings of the course. Then the diversity comes in and we try and capture that, you know. We're always saying that, you know, the foundation isn't set in concrete. It's fluid. So every semester we have check points. You know at the end of the semester we take in everyone's feedback, everyone's interests and then we sort of try and fit it in, you know. As best we can."

In summary, *Giving Voice to All* represents a major theme that arose from my research where study participants identified how the VLC program allowed for more diverse opinions and perspectives to be heard in online learning community settings. The VLC is seen as a safe place and, in particular, asynchronous discussion forums were viewed as an ideal format for voicing opinions, being heard, and not being forced to respond under any time pressure or other pressures of traditional face to face meetings. The concept of being a good citizen in the information age addresses not only etiquette or *netiquette*, as some have called it, but also how

we collaborate, communicate and help each other navigate through the information age. While diversity was seen by most participants as an important factor and useful in being exposed to different perspectives and worldviews, actual participation in the VLC program by ethnically diverse groups is low. Nevertheless, in contrast to traditional face to face working group structures, differing opinions can thrive in online learning communities. *Giving Voice to All* is represented in diagram 10 below by a low amplitude, high frequency wave that reflects low participation and high diversity of groups that see this as an important aspect of the VLC program.

Diagram 10: Giving voice to all frequency



Political and social change

Social change will continue to occur throughout the Columbia community as a result of changed relationships and interactions in the ever expanding online community and culture. The VLC program has, according to the study participants, been an active agent for this change. But while the VLC program may be unique to Columbia, the changing social environment is not. Simply put, the old ways of doing business in institutions of higher education have disappeared or soon will. The information age has forced open the conduit of social and power sharing between administrators, faculty and students. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are one

example of this, where any number of students can enroll in open courses offered by Universities regardless of admission policies. But more pervasive is the explosion of course content by teachers and students on blog sites, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and other non-school or LMS platforms, as a result of the need to distribute or stream content quickly and flexibly to students. As a result, and with little media attention or fanfare, the face of education has become distinctly connectivist, where students move imperceptibly between nodes of information and teacher/learner communities. Administrations in many cases do not even know how their faculty are conveying course content in the information age and may not care, as long as the faculty member attracts students and the institution maintains enrollment and revenue stream. Furthermore, a substantial presence on the Internet is seen as a distinct professional advantage to faculty rather than a threat to the institution or any inferred intellectual property. It is where one must be if one wishes to remain relevant.

Most of this change in the status quo of education has taken place without planning but as a direct result of the power inherent in new technology to determine social and power relationships. The invention of the printing press provides one of the most striking examples in human history of how technology can alter society and hegemony. But while the transformative forces of technology are not new to the information age, they have become greatly accelerated in it. Educational institutions that have remained largely unchanged in over a hundred years are now threatened by the imminent convergence of both the teacher and the learner. By inference, in a connectivist theory of learning, the teacher and learner may become the same at any given moment and even reverse roles as the speed of technological progress overtakes the ability of the teacher to know *it* before *it* has been consumed by students. In my own teaching in my programming classes I have learned at the very least to open each class with an innocent sounding but nevertheless (sheepishly) pleading, “So what’s new?”

But the role of students, teachers and institutions are fiercely entrenched in our culture and hegemony and it will take time for faculty to begin to accept the new relationships, both social and political. According to one of the interviewees, administrative obstacles continue to exist within some departments and that requires some level of covert assistance to other colleagues within the VLC. Politics can and do play a role in how faculty work with each other and collaboration is, in some learning communities, discouraged. Isolationism still exists (at least at the time this study was conducted) at Columbia and some administrators are less than supportive of cooperation, let alone collaboration between departments. Christine says,

> "…some of what exists in our institution is a mentality of don't collaborate, just…work independently. So that's an obstacle if you let it be. If you say some of the obstacles that exist are resistance to using new technologies. A resistance to view our students as customers. A resistance to collaborate and share because maybe the myth is that takes too much time I'd rather just go do it myself. All of those things are obstacles if you let them be."

But other VLC participants view what they experience with the online learning community as an opportunity to re-examine the power relationship within their own classrooms. According to Sandra,

> "I think that there's power dynamics everywhere. In everything. And it's something that you know the more I do this work the more I try to be really conscious of before I enter any space. So what does it mean that I'm entering a space and I'm a woman? What does it mean that I'm entering a space and I'm white? What does it mean that I'm entering a space and I'm straight? And I haven't had the experiences that some of the people in my space can, have been through and these are things that are really challenging their work in the classroom. And maybe it's challenging their work in the classroom because of how they personally identify and how students see them. Maybe

> this is challenging their work in the classroom because of how students identify and whether or not that faculty member sees them or not. And sees the individual dragons that some of our students are trying to slay."

Is social media important anymore?

While some participants use social media extensively in their teaching and learning, others do not. There seems to be a culture of social media activists that exists within the Columbia community, but this is not as extensive as one might think, given the Columbia mantra of changing cultural norms. What seems to be typical, is that with all online technology, what is critically important and relevant today, is old and irrelevant tomorrow. Once again, the connectivist view of the world states that is not what we know or what we use today, but our capacity for acquiring the right tool and information at any given moment. And so, while Roger feels that Facebook is old and Instagram is, "…sort of the buzz at the moment", Sandra continues to engage in discussions with her students on Facebook over a year since her formal class ended with them on the Moodle LMS.

Jenny has been continually engaged in technology for both her educational practice and her art activism which are inextricably linked in her everyday habits. She tells the story of how she met an artist from Israel in 2000 and used Skype to collaborate with her for years. Jenny was using Skype to conduct classes from Germany when I first met her at Columbia. She says,

> "So there was that capacity for that collaboration just two people partnership. But there's also I think the capacity for collaboration through things like Facebook. People can come together around a particular cause. People can work together and become aware also of like-minded people who may be interested in putting their energies into a certain thing whether it's an activist project or an art project or something like that… Is it being fully utilized? Probably not. I feel like we're only using a tip of an iceberg. I feel like that's the

case here. I feel like that may be the case in the world at large."

Recalling the theme of good citizenry, Sandra implores academic departments to not only support the use of online technology, but to model it for students as well:

> "…what do you want to say? This is where being a good citizen is connected to this idea too… You could learn everything possible about literary craft, but what do you want to do with it? What kind of conversations do you want to be a part of? What sort of contributions do you want to make to a greater dialog that's happening in the world? Like what do you want your art to do? And then there's how do you do it? How do you get it out there? And certainly technology, that conversation is 90%, again arbitrary percentages, but a huge amount of that is having an understanding of digital publication and what does that mean? So I am really surprised when academic departments period aren't engaging in the use of technology. Not only in just using it as a way to make the classroom run easier and smoother and more efficiently but also modeling the technology as part of the day to day life that they're going to be using in whatever their discipline is."

In summary, *Political and Social Change* can occur as a result of changed relationships that have occurred with the development of the VLC program, online learning communities and a growing culture of online engagement, collaboration, community building, knowledge creation and willingness to speak out and face fears related to technology and new ways of learning and teaching. VLC program participants also report that their experience of working with other faculty members in online communities has made them re-examine power relationships within their own classrooms. In the information age, the teacher and learner may exchange roles and even occupy the same role in any given moment in time and space as the speed at which information is distributed overtakes our ability to know that it even exists.

Some faculty integrate social media into their teaching and learning while others do not. As technology changes, so do sites of learning and types of sites that are used by both students and faculty. Social media has remained relevant and still appears to be meaningful particularly for students and teachers who wish to remain connected after their formal classes have ended. They are important sites to share information and knowledge continuously with fellow faculty, former and current students and others.

Political and Social Change is represented in diagram 11 below by a low amplitude and very high frequency wave that reflects the rapidly changing face of emerging technologies and online culture and the low number of early adopters at Columbia. The limited opportunities for innovators is somewhat compensated for by their vocal advocacy and participation in programs like the VLC program.

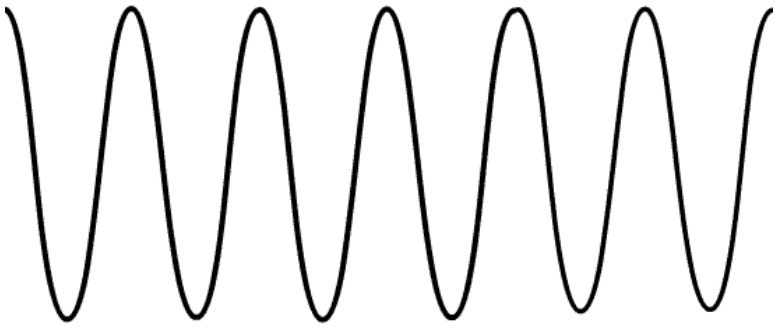


Diagram 11: Political and social change frequency

Summary of chapter six

In chapter six, I discussed three additional themes that emerged from my research; *Community Building, Giving Voice to All, and Political and Social Change*. I call these themes *strange overtones of consonance and dissonance* as when added to the previous set of frequencies, they form a complex, and at times dissonant set of resonating frequencies that represent the more nuanced and subtle themes that arose from my research. While these themes may seem dissonant and at odds with building resonating communities, they reflect the individuals and departments along with the obstacles, power relationships, conflicts and very human aspects that are at the heart of the VLC program. All of the themes described above combine to create an outward flow of resonating frequencies I call *waves of transformation* represented in diagram 12 (SoylentGreen, 2007) below.

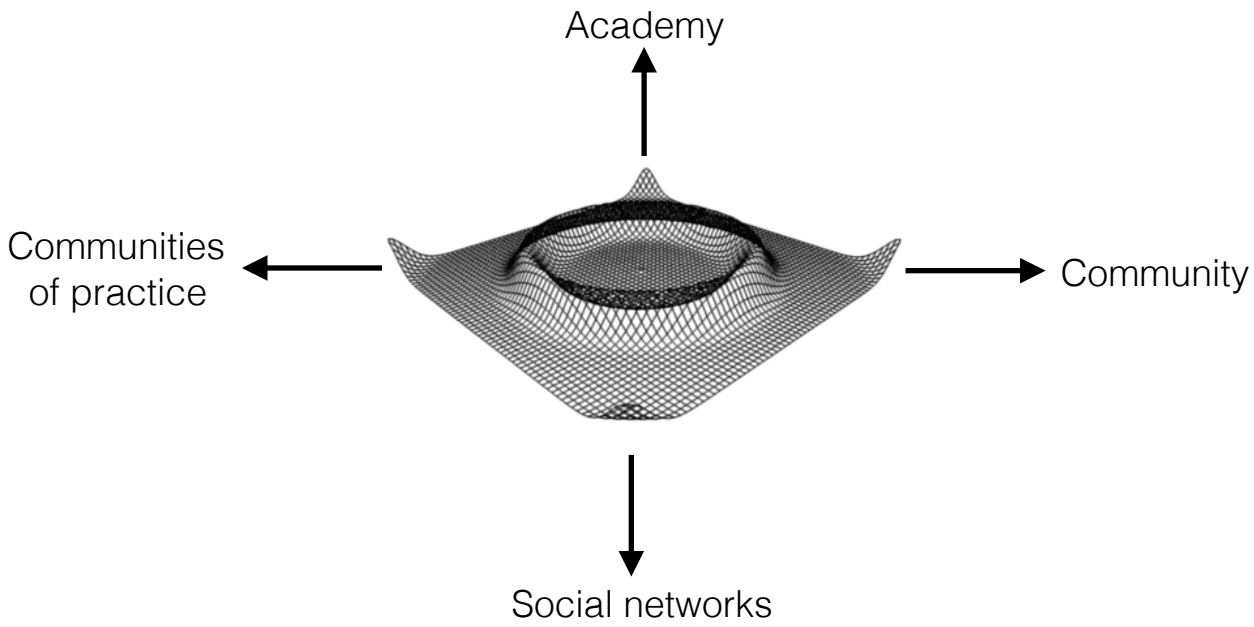


Diagram 12: Resonating frequencies of a virtual learning community

Chapter seven: Conclusions

Overcoming fears and resistance to change

Online learning communities can help adult learners overcome fears and resistance to change in a number of ways. Many fears about technology and teaching online are founded in concerns about job security and the devaluation of a faculty member's intellectual worth by putting their ideas and content online. However, through connecting to peers, other professionals, and online resources outside the Columbia LMS, including YouTube, Vimeo, blog sites and online communities of practice, faculty are finding that online presence as well as publication is more important than protecting intellectual property in terms of professional advancement and job security.

Another challenge for faculty comes from anxiety about new ways of teaching and learning in the rapidly changing information age. The VLC program has helped many faculty engage with their colleagues in discussion forums, wikis, via email, and even through social media. As faculty face their fears and become more connected to online community resources, information and new networks of peers, as well as online communities of practice, they learn new skills, become more comfortable with using online technology and embrace virtual classroom spaces.

The VLC program can help faculty overcome the fear of being overwhelmed by technology and online teaching, in particular, by providing much of the information needed for acquiring new skills and ways of teaching through the online learning community itself. For example, assignments, lesson plans, video tutorials, and clear instructions can be posted in the learning community site and faculty can also engage in discussion with other faculty members

about topics ranging from developing a multi-section course syllabus to learning different and new ways of teaching old content.

For many faculty, just taking an online course and being involved in a virtual community can help allay some of the fears they have about online teaching and learning. However, real concerns about the amount of time and effort that is required to teach online still persist and seem well-founded based on the responses of participants in this study, previous faculty surveys, and existing research. But despite the need to address those concerns and balance potential increased work loads for faculty, the benefits of having an online presence outweigh the fears of learning how to create and maintain that presence. The fear of using technology, according to many I have talked to during my research, should not be as great as the fear of not using it.

Once you've had the experience, you want it to continue.

Many faculty members are fearful of being exposed in online discussion forums with their peers as technically illiterate, intellectually deficient, or downright unintelligent. However, most people have probably felt vulnerable when posting online comments whether in a VLC, or any type of online forum on the Internet in general. Among academics, it can be particularly embarrassing to appear uneducated, and so some faculty are reluctant and even defiant when asked to participate in such discussions which can live on in perpetuity.

Despite these fears, all participants reported positive experiences in discussion forums and, in particular, a level of safety because of the asynchronous nature of the discussion forums where faculty are not forced to *think on their feet*, but can weigh their responses over time and thoughtfully before posting. Moreover, discussion forums in adult learning communities are powerful venues to give voice to peers in a professional development setting.

Adult learners in the VLC program are exposed to a variety of viewpoints and new habits of learning in a connected community. For some, the interaction with other faculty members in informal and safe multi-section course, departmental or other types of online communities, can be a transformative learning experience where they reflect on their own practice and exchange ideas and concepts with others during sometimes intense, enjoyable, personal and even confrontational dialogue. For some participants of online communities, the moment of actually meeting another person whom they had previously spent a great deal of time and emotional energy conversing with in a virtual world, can be like meeting a long lost cousin. According to Robert, “Once you’ve had that experience, you want it to continue”.

The knowledge of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts

Faculty are finding new ways of learning in the information age. In the VLC program, for example, they are empowered to collaborate more effectively in online settings because they are not restricted to set meeting times but can discuss in asynchronous or synchronous meeting spaces in their own time and space. Faculty who have been isolated in their teaching for years, are finding that they have more of a voice in the VLC and that their opinions, life experiences, and viewpoints are valued more when they are able to express them voluntarily and thoughtfully in an online environment.

Connectivist theories appear to be at work in how departments and the Columbia community as a whole grow through becoming a part of the VLC network. As stated previously, the concept of connected knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) applies at a macro level to departments as well as individuals in a professional faculty development setting. Simply put, departments are hearing from their own faculty that other departments who are participating in the VLC program are benefiting from it, and urging their department leaders to

also engage in the program. “Why can’t we do what they’re doing in Art & Design? Have you seen their VLC?”

Online culture grows more from the ground up

The VLC program grew organically from silos of faculty practice. However, nurturing and maintaining them can be a time consuming, exhaustive and futile exercise if the participants have no need to visit the site, retrieve any materials, or engage in any discussion with other faculty members. Faculty will not use an online learning community site unless they have a need to do so and even in the best of scenarios, participation is rarely 100% of the membership. VLC participation is, therefore, very much needs-based and non-recreational.

For some online learning communities, the activity levels are cyclical. Those, for example, that are made up of faculty teaching in multi-section courses, or specific departmental areas, as well as those that are working groups or committee type communities, will often start out with a great deal of activity and then diminish over time. However, this is not the whole story.

For some faculty, online communities maintain archival information and links to previous discussions, including research, arguments, decisions and recommendations. They are a way for administrators to avoid having to reinvent courses or ideas for courses and a way for faculty to see lesson plans and ideas and course designs that would otherwise have to be reinvented. However, there is no formal policy for tending and maintaining these sites and IT departments typically view them as inactive course pages taking up server space.

And so these once vibrant communities will wither and die without immediate purpose becoming merely repositories and shadows of their former selves. But they will regenerate. Despite this passing of activity, they seem to fire up other communities with a new need and purpose. The idea of the VLC is more important than any individual instance. The ability to create a virtual learning community is a way for faculty and staff to take control of their own

community and share their inspirations and have their voices heard, no matter how short lived. As a result, online learning communities at Columbia have remained vibrant and organic (MacDonald, 2006). Since 2012 alone, over 260 online learning communities have been created and over 150 are in active use. The others may be empty and void of life, but many have been alive at one time and hold some treasures for archivists or future historians.

Diversity is lacking in the VLC program

Online learning communities at Columbia have a diverse population when taking into account variables including gender, age, teaching experience, online teaching experience and culture. However, the lack of ethnic diversity in the program is disappointing. I was unable to identify any specific reason for this during the course of my research, although I did ask participants specific questions regarding the diversity in their constituent communities.

A minority of participants felt that diversity was not an important factor in how online learning communities acquire knowledge whereas a majority did. In fact, the issue of diversity of viewpoints and the need for different voices to be heard in the VLC program came up time and time again.

The role of race, gender, and culture in the acquisition of knowledge in online learning communities remains largely unanswered. However, the finding that online learning communities can and do provide a safe place for voices to be heard and freedom of expression, and that diverse perspectives are so often expressed, provides an important insight into the potential for the VLC program to become even more vibrant if, and hopefully, when that important inclusion occurs.

Designing best models for adult learning communities

While none of the online learning communities used in this study adhere strictly to andragogical course design as prescribed by Rachal's (2002) seven criteria, nearly all of them,

with the exception of one, in general, are modeled on Knowles' (1980) six andragogical assumptions. They all assume that faculty are adult learners who believe they are responsible for their own education. They all take into account and encourage faculty to share their own life experiences. They all assume that faculty are ready to learn and want to learn what they can apply to their work and/or personal lives. They all assume that faculty are task oriented and problem-centered learners who want to learn specific skills for everyday situations. They all assume that faculty are goal oriented and lastly, they all assume that faculty are motivated to learn as part of their professional development, self-improvement and desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem and even security.

Those that differ primarily from Rachal's alternative criteria do so in the areas of being non-voluntary, and having performance-based assessment of achievement. Several of the departments participating in the VLC program require their faculty to be members of the online learning community, however, none of them currently have performance-based assessment, nor ways for membership to report on satisfaction of use in the VLC.

New habits in the information ecology

It is clear that as faculty become more connected to one another and entire communities and networks outside of their own institutions, they will need to acquire new habits for the information ecology. They will need to model new ways of navigating these networks and continually be learner/teachers as they should always have been even before the advent of the computer. But there is also a responsibility to model good online citizenship and to know when technology is not the answer and to know the shortcomings and dangers of living and working in virtual communities, be they professional or social. The practice of connectivism should not replace critical thinking and problem solving. Because technology advances at ever increasing

speeds it does not necessarily follow that human social skills, emotions and intellect will do the same.

We need to keep in mind Rheingold's (1993) warning that, while virtual communities may be a way for us to reconnect with our lost neighborhoods of old, they may also be "…precisely the wrong place to look for the rebirth of community" (p. 2)

Chapter eight: Recommendations

Advocating for inclusion

One of the most alarming findings is that, in most online learning communities, there is a noticeable lack of ethnic diversity. Heterogeneity can help create more vibrant VLC programs in the future. While student and faculty populations continue to be more representative of the population as a whole, and inclusion is seen as important at Columbia, as well as most institutions, African American and Latino representation in the VLC program, for example, and online learning communities as a whole, remains less than expected by this researcher, who is also a member of the college community.

Columbia prides itself as one of the most diverse colleges in the nation, and has departments for African-American Cultural Affairs, Asian Cultural Affairs, Latino Cultural Affairs, LGBTQ Office of Culture & Community, International Programs, International Student Affairs, and Multicultural Student Affairs (Niche, 2015). Data from the National Education Data Statistics (2013) website indicates that while almost 60% of students at Columbia are white, 17% are African American and 11% are Latino, with 3% Asian. Despite these factors, the number of racially diverse fellowship applications by faculty has remained low. For example, in spring of 2014, 28 faculty members applied for either an LMS, VLC, or Online Instructional Fellowship (CiTE, 2014). Among those faculty submitting applications, 26 were white, one was African American and one was of another ethnicity. These figures are disappointing to say the least. It is important that leaders and institutions in academia realize that the lack of diversity in the use of technology in education strikes at the very core of inequality and hegemony. It is precisely this manifestation of the status quo that creates an imbalance in power and relationships. Access to and effective use of technology is an outward and visible sign of power and privilege and is a

fundamental frequency for democratic social change. Technology leaders as well as administrators and faculty need to vigorously advocate for inclusion in technology in the information age. It has been exactly 20 years since President Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore (1998) announced plans to bridge the *Digital Divide* by, "…wiring every classroom and library to the Internet" (p.1) and yet those goals are still a long way from being fully realized. More needs to be done to make online learning communities and sites of faculty development more organic and dynamic by making sure they are *radically heterogeneous* (MacDonald (2006) sites of vibrant and continual learning.

Building a culture, maintaining and valuing what it means now and in the future

It is important that faculty and staff have the ability to administer not only their own online learning communities, but the LMS itself. Departments who have autonomy are more likely to take initiative and support their staff and students when they have the tools to engineer their own communities and new ways of teaching and learning. Moreover, it is their way of creating a unique culture, asking questions specific to their discipline and then debating and discussing alternative architectures for their own unique needs.

The VLC program and online learning communities in general are cultural and historical sites of informal human interaction. In most cases, faculty, administrators, researchers and educational theorists underestimate the importance of these sites of learning much in the same way as educational historians and scholars failed for years to recognize the importance of a variety of informal sites of learning and culture building. For example, in Fred Schied's *Learning in Social Context: Workers and Adult Education in Nineteenth Century Chicago* (1993), the author examines the role of community meeting places, workers clubs, unions and socialist publications and literature of the period in educating, empowering and mobilizing immigrant workers to challenge the status quo in industrial Chicago. Colleges and universities need to

maintain records of virtual learning communities so that future scholars and researchers can view the complex challenges we face today and how we met those challenges.

Designing online communities with adults in mind

Andragogical assumptions and connectivist principles play an important role in designing online sites for future faculty development. More specifically, the general assumptions outlined by Knowles (1980) are suitable for contemporary adult online learning communities in general, and no less suitable in an educational setting. Mandatory participation and directed learning with scored assessments are not as likely to yield voluntary critical thinking, self reflection and collaboration with others if faculty feel like the VLC is, in reality, the panopticon.

Technology and surviving armageddon

Technology infrastructure is critical to the success of any VLC or online faculty development. Nothing can take the wind out of the sails of online learning communities more than when the hardware breaks down. The stuff of the Internet; servers, routers, switches and hubs can fail. Networks can become inundated with traffic and stop responding. More common obstacles to online communities however, are poorly designed programs. In other words, software that is difficult to use, or does not work right, or is frustrating. It is important that both hardware and software as well as support services are up to the task to support the school community. It is also important that future faculty and administrators have practical contingency plans for what to do if and when either software or hardware fail. How do you continue to communicate virtually when you are cut off from your LMS?

The beauty of the Internet in tandem with connectivist principles is that there will always be alternative channels and networks. Remember, the Internet was originally (see ARPANET in glossary) designed to survive a nuclear war, so you should be able to survive as long as your online class or VLC has an alternative network pre-arranged. Administrators and IT managers

keep in mind, however, that forcing users to alternative routes one too many times can lead them to a habit of avoiding the school's infrastructure altogether. This is, ironically, what the catalyst for the VLC program was in the first place!

Chapter nine: Final reflections on my practice

Since entering the ACE doctoral program I have been introduced to a new and critically reflective way of viewing my work that has changed the way I see my own practice of adult education in a social and political context.

The social aspect of my work has involved working with many individuals and departments across the Columbia community during technology training programs, professional development workshops, online courses, and development and coordination of the LMS, VLC, and Online Instructional Fellowship programs. As I developed relationships with faculty, staff and administrators, I also encountered political realities that had an impact on the outcomes of collaborative efforts between myself, my colleagues and the Columbia college community.

Because this paper is in part a reflective narrative of my practice as an adult educator, I have chosen to frame it within four interlinked stages of transformational practice as defined by Margaret Ledwith and Jane Springett (2010, p. 23):

- questioning the status quo and dominant ideology
- identifying the key sites of intervention in the process of disempowerment
- creating new ways of seeing and making sense of the world (epistemology)
- creating new ways of being and acting in the world (ontology)

My research has provided me with an opportunity to reflect on how my practice has evolved and, in particular, how my doctoral studies have encouraged me to become more critical of my own work in recent years. Whether the latter would have occurred naturally may be questionable, but suffice it to say, I chose this path on my own while complacency was always an option. As Ledwith and Springett point out, “Critical reflection and transformative action are not separate processes: they are inextricably integrated as a unity of praxis” (p. 24). The authors and others note that without praxis our work is little more than thoughtless action.

Questioning the status quo and dominant ideology

Working through the Center for Innovation in Teaching Excellence (CiTE) at Columbia College Chicago, I have been able to, not only experiment with new technologies in the classroom, but also to work with faculty and departments in developing new ways for faculty to acquire skills and knowledge and collaborate with others across campus.

Within the CiTE, a small team of educators, including myself and from multiple disciplines have dedicated themselves to challenging the status quo and dominant ideology prevalent in many institutions of higher learning, including our own. The CiTE's (2014) mission statement declares that it,

> …supports the culture of learner-centered teaching at Columbia College Chicago by challenging all faculty to become more informed, confident, creative, and reflective teachers. As an integral unit of Academic Affairs, the CiTE provides leadership in exploring and promoting innovative technologies and pedagogies that enhance teaching and learning across the curriculum and fosters excellence by providing the space and opportunity for collaboration and experimentation.

This mission statement defines a broad vision that, while admittedly idealistic, is nonetheless deliberately questioning of the status quo and "challenges" faculty to become more informed and reflective in their practice. As a member of the CiTE, I have been a vocal collaborator in defining this mission and, to no lesser degree, my doctoral studies and fellow cohort members in that program helped shape what my practice is today.

In practice, however, our CiTE team is confronted with many obstacles in pursuing our mission. Columbia's culture, while artistically bent and professing a rebel artist's persona, has remained doggedly framed in the dominant ideology of more traditional Liberal Arts institutions. Despite the vision of Mike Alexandroff, it's sixth president who is credited with reinventing

Columbia as a Liberal Arts College with an emphasis on providing real world arts and media experience and a progressive social agenda, and the dedicated work of faculty like Randy Albers, and many others, Columbia has endured an extended period of blurred vision and conflicted motives. The economic realities since 2008 facing many private colleges without massive endowments have had an impact on the compassionate ideology of Columbia's founders. Very recently though, there have been hopeful signs that the status quo may be changing. That story remains to be written. However, the CiTE regularly conducts programs which challenge faculty to question their culture and practice.

One such program engages faculty in studying bell hooks' seminal work, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (1994) and another, Ken Bain's *What the Best College Teachers Do* (2004). Through weeks of vigorous group discussion and analyses of these two texts, faculty become more critically reflective of their practice in the classroom.

In my own social interaction with faculty members, I have often shared views and strategies that were not entirely congruent with official positions and policies at Columbia but were nevertheless pursued enthusiastically. Through the CiTE, I have pioneered and coordinated an innovative program to develop online learning communities in many departments where faculty interact with each other online to develop dynamic curriculum and connectivist communities. In these learning communities, the knowledge of the community is greater than the sum of the parts (Downes, 2007). In addition, through online courses I conduct through the CiTE, I can demonstrate in practice with faculty learners, effective andragogical principles as defined by Malcolm Knowles (1980) and advocated by many online learning scholars including Palloff and Pratt (2007) and Joe Bradley (2010). These online workshops and virtual communities not only expose faculty to new ways of knowing, but they also use a learner centered approach espoused by humanists like Knowles and others and which is one of the tenets of the CiTE's mission.

When I recently interviewed a member of one of these virtual learning communities as part of my doctoral research, I was surprised to find that many faculty, including herself, were defying anti-collaborative edicts from department chairs and deans in order that they may work effectively with their colleagues, rather than remain isolated and uninformed (about other practices). Indeed, this phenomenon of isolating departments from one another and individual faculty members and staff from upper administration has been commonplace over the past several years, but is hopefully beginning to change. Politically, policy is driven heavily from the top down and staff and faculty still may risk much, including their jobs, by questioning the dominant ideology and lack of transparency. Our social interaction with faculty and staff during training programs, developmental workshops and online courses, has too often felt like a lifeline for each of us.

Despite this cultural hegemony across academia maintained by divisiveness, centralized power, and lack of transparency, attempts to disempower faculty and staff as well as project directors has, at least in part, been undermined by an increasing use of technology at social and political levels. Through online learning communities, twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, blogs and online communities of practice, as well as MOOCs and other recent online phenomena, educators are becoming increasingly aware of how the status quo remains in place. On a grander scale, Ledwith and Springett (2010) see this same trend at the global level and state that, “We are witnessing the rise of a counter-hegemony that emphasizes shared responsibility for all in common humanity, that a globalized world connected by technology and trade must also be connected by shared values and accountability” (p. 55).

Identifying key sites of intervention in the process of disempowerment

While disempowerment has at times over the years been a key feature of the culture at Columbia, fear has never completely paralyzed the willingness and commitment of many

individuals to create change in their departments and across the campus community. There are many sites where my own practice allows me to empower faculty and yes, even chairs and deans!

A recent meeting between the CiTE and the department of Multicultural Affairs illustrates one such intersection and potential site for intervention in the process of disempowerment. During an initial two hour meeting between our two teams, we worked collaboratively to identify common obstacles and potential short term and long-term solutions. Symbolically, we used our own CiTE learning space for the meeting which has four walls all coated with “idea paint”, which is a surface that acts like a dry erase board without needing the actual board. During the meeting, which was an open discussion facilitated by the directors but with no agenda, all participants freely rose from their chairs and wrote down ideas on the wall somewhere as people were speaking. Before too long, the wall was filled with the keywords and concepts from our collaborative discussion.

Many of the primary concerns of the whole group were directly related to student experiences and included, for example, professors who don’t always respect different cultures and genders and are responsible for multiple and related micro-aggressions. Another question raised was how do we engage faculty in discussions about diversity and inclusion? How do we initiate these conversations without triggering fear? Frustrated, many participants asked simply, how is it possible to even influence the administration? And, just because we have a diverse population it doesn’t make us inclusive!

This initiative brought together two teams of people who were committed to challenging the dominant ideology and, working together, to bridging the gap between faculty and students and core principles of inclusion not currently practiced. Most faculty weren't even aware of what micro-aggressions were, let alone the consequences.

Ledwith and Springett (2010) draw upon Mayo’s (2004) work in stating that,

> Unless teacher education involves an analysis of power and status of the teacher across the difference and diversity of the classroom, schooling inevitably remains hegemonic: a site where the dominant control ideas that maintain their dominance, and the subordinated produce ideas that maintain their subordination. In these ways, the system becomes self-perpetuating, maintaining the status quo with a flexible balance of coercion and consent (p.160).

Creating new ways of making sense of the world (epistemology)

Through my doctoral research of the VLC program and my work at the CiTE, I have become more aware of the fact that what we really know is transitory and ever changing. One faculty member recently said to me, “The future is now, and we don’t know what the future will be.” This seemingly paradoxical statement fits nicely in our information ecology.

Similarly, critical reflection provides a vehicle to remain open to doing things differently and viewing the world in new, evolving and relevant ways. Only through constant re-examination of my practice and collaboration with others can I renew my own desire to acquire new knowledge. In fact, in my work at the CiTE, a constant obstacle to teacher education (and a constant source of poor student evaluations) is the natural tendency of teachers to be satisfied with their courses and be resistant to change. Course content becomes outdated, irrelevant and, in some cases, just wrong. Knowledge may be a fleeting illusion and, according to connectivists like Siemens (2004) and Downes (2007), the ability to acquire knowledge is more important than knowledge itself.

According to Ledwith and Springett (2010), critical reflection is an ecological imperative and one model that identifies this cyclical process of critical reflection leading to transformation is Rowan’s (1981) cycle model. Ledwith and Springett explain that, “Although it is possible to enter the cycle at any stage, for ease of explanation we will begin at being, the stage at which

we become aware that our practice needs to change. What we have been doing is no longer relevant to what is happening, and we need to think about things differently" (p.152).

My own personal decision to enter the ACE doctoral program at National Louis University came about after a period of critical reflection about the nature and value of my practice. While I had worked in education most of my life, I felt that I needed to seek more of a theoretical grounding on which to base my work in online teaching and learning as well as professional faculty development. I could see the need to research what I was doing while I was doing it, and, through social interaction with my colleagues and family members was encouraged to do just that.

Creating new ways of being and acting in the world (ontology)

As I continue my work in the CiTE and continue to conduct research in the field of online teaching and learning and virtual communities, I am constantly being changed, not only in terms of what I know, but in terms of who I am. I have become aware through my work and research that the collaborative and collective processes prevalent in institutional social networks, whether physical or virtual, play a critical role in effective practice. In other words, my own work cannot exist in a vacuum, regardless of the technology or theory behind it. There is a core need for social and personal commitment to change and this must be shared with and by others.

One faculty member told me recently that she saw collaboration as a core skill needed in today's information ecology. As I become more critically reflective of my own practice, I begin to change how I act in the world. By participating in the work of others, we help change them and ourselves. Along with becoming more collaborative, however, I have had to become more open to change. Truly listening to others is a skill that can take a lifetime to acquire and over the past few years, I have found it useful to listen and to probe more deeply for what people are trying to

say about their own experiences. This is one of the reasons I provided detailed notes about the meeting with cultural affairs, as no one had bothered to listen to them previously. Their proposals had been rejected until we (the CiTE) spent time with them and offered an informal and innovative way to learn and work together.

In my work with the CiTE and through my research and doctoral studies, I have tried to be open to new ways of knowing and new ways of being. According to Ledwith and Springett, three key stages in the process of transformation are, "…changing our selves, connecting with others, and changing the world" (p. 201).

Transcendence

If you are expecting at this moment a profound thought about what all of this means, I hope you will not be too disappointed with this very short story I am about to tell. It is only fitting that I end this chapter of my work in such a way.

In the last year of my doctoral research, my wife Laurie and I decided to fly from our home in Chicago out to visit one of our sons and his girlfriend who were living in Santa Monica. I was in the process of data analysis and so my mind was very much trying to make meaning of years of data I had collected for my research.

After we had reached cruising altitude, the inflight entertainment began and they informed us they would be showing a movie called *Transcendence* (2014), starring Johnny Depp, Rebecca Hall and Morgan Freeman on our flight. I had heard about the plot of the movie and, although I rarely watch in-flight movies, I decided to go ahead and watch it as the story about artificial intelligence, the Internet and technology in general, was already on my mind, we had four hours of boredom ahead, and it sounded interesting. Laurie decided to read a book instead.

Without going into too much detail, Johnny Depp's character is a brilliant, though fiercely ambitious and competitive scientist who has discovered a way to store sentient beings (namely monkeys) on computer networks including the Internet. His work is promising and exciting to some, but terrifying and threatening to others. Anti-technology groups target him and carry out an assassination attempt. But before he dies, his co-worker, collaborator and wife, Rebecca Hall's character, fulfills his life's work by transferring his entire life experience and mental being onto a computer hard drive, where it immediately begins to access the internet and takes on a life of its own. Remember, this is sci-fi.

Needless to say, Hall and Depp's relationship becomes strained with his new omniscient yet impotent existence and, as his powers increase, so do her suspicions about his ultimate intentions. However, she is torn between her love for him and her duty to preserve life on Earth. As he fortifies his defenses readying a total transformation of all life itself, his wife remains the last actual non-binary person with direct access to him. Morgan Freeman's character finally appears to persuade her that she must make a choice between the destruction of her husband and the destruction of all life as we know it. Just at the moment that she is about to make that fateful decision, the in-flight entertainment system was completely shut down and the little movie screen retreated into the ceiling above our heads. I was looking forward to seeing how this epic struggle between human kind and technology would end and was left wondering…

The captain explained that he was in error and, while ironically trying to solve some other technology issue, had inadvertently switched off our movie! He rewound the tape (metaphorically) and started it over. This time, it was Laurie's turn to watch the entire movie while I sat and pondered the outcome. But almost exactly at the same moment that I had been thwarted, the system was shut down again, this time because we had actually reached Los Angeles airport and were about to land.

We never got to see the end of Transcendence, and, although it would be easy enough to find out what happened, I think it was meant to be that way. You see, my story about virtual communities, connectivism, the Internet and technology doesn't end here, and it never will. It is the nature of technology and human beings to struggle together through the ages. I think the writers of Transcendence knew that. I would like to leave the ending unresolved.

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Appendix i: Terms and concepts used in this paper

Arduino is an open source company that manufactures Arduino boards. These boards are micro processing controllers that can be programmed using computer languages like C or C++ to control a variety of input and output devices that interface and interact with the physical world.

ARPANET stands for Advanced Research Projects Agency Network and was designed in the late 1960's to enable a number of innovations for computer mediated communications, namely the transfer of information in *packets* of data between computers. These innovations had the effect of increasing the reliability of networked communications in the event of switch and node failures. Increased nuclear war survivability was, according to some, not the primary goal of the scientists who developed it, but it certainly was an outcome, and the Agency was later funded by the U.S. Department of Defense and renamed Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency or **DARPA**.

Blog is a contraction of Weblog, which is a way of enabling journaling on web pages. In contrast to standard web pages, blogs enable certain features including, subscription services, dated entries that are usually limited in size, like a journal entry, and they can allow comments by other online users.

Asynchronous means not at the same time. This term is usually used to refer to the use of online discussion forums or bulletin boards, where users post a message and others reply. The discussion that ensues is called a discussion *thread*. Blogs can also be asynchronous

CiTE stands for Center for Innovation in Teaching Excellence, which is based at Columbia College Chicago

CMC stands for Computer Mediated Communications

CNC Mill is a milling machine programmed with the use of computer numerical control (CNC)

Discussion forums are asynchronous activities in online sites where participants can post messages (also referred to as posts) and reply to others. They are sometimes just referred to as forums.

Hybrid (also referred to as blended) courses are courses that meet both online and face to face. There is little formal structure for these and the amount of time that is spent online and face to face, however, generally, a courses would be considered hybrid if anywhere from 20% to 80% of the course is delivered online. If > 90% of the course is online, it would be considered an online course. If < 20% of the course is online it would be considered web enhanced face to face. An example would be if the class was five weeks long, and the first and last class were face to face and the three classes in between were delivered wholly online, then that class would be considered hybrid or blended.

Idea paint is a special paint that, once dry, can be written on with dry erase markers and treated just like a dry erase board.

Instagram is a social networking site where users share pictures and captions and text with each other.

LMS stand for learning management system

Manifest Urban Arts Festival is an annual event held each May by Columbia in the South Loop of Chicago and in and around the Columbia campus. According to the Columbia web site, “Columbia College Chicago invites you to our annual showcase and celebration of the student work that only our students can create. At Manifest, you will encounter thought-provoking gallery exhibitions, live performances, fashion shows, original game design, literary readings and more; all curated by the talent that defines our campus” (Columbia College Chicago, 2015).

MOOC stands for massive open online course

Moodle is an acronym for Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment

Oasis stands for Online Administrative Student and Information System

Pinterest is a social media site also featuring images and captions

Processing is an open source integrated development environment (IDE) that allows for easy programming of media related projects and as an introduction to larger programming concepts

Routers most commonly are used to provide access for multiple devices to share Internet services via one single Internet Protocol (IP) address

RSS (Feeds) stands for really simple syndication and is a way to provide a shortened version of multiple web pages or articles as a feed with links to the original and larger article

Servers are computers that are connected to the Internet usually via a static IP address and contain one or more web sites and content. Servers run software specifically with the purpose of providing data for Internet users and are accessed either directly via their IP address or through the domain name system (DNS)

Switches or hubs are hardware devices that connect multiple devices on a network, usually a local area network or LAN

Synchronous is synonymous with simultaneous. A synchronous discussion is one that is occurring in real time

Thread is a group of messages connected by the same topic (subject heading) between two or more discussion participants

VLC stands for virtual learning community

Wiki is a web based document that is usually shared by two or more users. Wiki comes from the Hawaiian term meaning quick. A wiki page or site allows multiple users to edit the same documents, keep track of history of who did what and when and revert to previous versions if desired, Wikis usually link to other wikis and enable “hot” linking to embedded concepts and articles, e.g. Wikipedia.

VLC Questionnaire CLICK HERE TO BEGIN

Export to Excel

Submitted answers: 32
Questions: 27

1. (PTFT) Which of the following best describes you? Please check all that apply.

- Part-time, Adjunct: 12 (38.71 %)
- Full-time faculty: 14 (45.16 %)
- Staff: 9 (29.03 %)

2. (RaceEthnicity) Which of the following best describes you?

- Black or African American: 2 (6.25 %)
- Hispanic, Mexican-American, or Latino: 1 (3.13 %)
- White, Caucasian, or European: 27 (84.38 %)
- East Asian: 1 (3.13 %)
- South Asian: 1 (3.13 %)
- Pacific Islander: 0
- Middle Eastern: 0
- Other (please describe in answer 3): 0

3. (OtherRaceEthnicity) If your race/ethnicity is not included in question 2, please enter it here

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4. (Gender) Which of the following best describes you?

- Female: 19 (59.38 %)
- Male: 13 (40.63 %)

5. (Age) Which of the following best describes you?

- 18-24: 0
- 25-44: 15 (46.88 %)

- 45-64: 15 (46.88 %)
- 65 or older: 1 (3.13 %)

6. (CollegeTeachingExperience) How long have you been teaching at the college level?

- 0 to 1 year: 0
- 2 to 5 years: 5 (15.63 %)
- 6 to 10 years: 8 (25.00 %)
- 11 to 20 years: 13 (40.63 %)
- 21 years or more: 6 (18.75 %)

7. (VLCMembership) Which of the following departmental virtual learning communities (VLCs) do you belong to. Please check all that apply.

- Art & Design: 6 (18.75 %)
- Arts, Entertainment and Media Management: 8 (25.00 %)
- Audio Arts and Acoustics: 1 (3.13 %)
- Cinema Art & Science: 2 (6.25 %)
- Creative Arts Therapies: 0
- Dance: 0
- Fashion Studies: 1 (3.13 %)
- First-Year Seminar: 9 (28.13 %)
- Humanities, History & Social Sciences: 0
- Interactive Arts & Media: 1 (3.13 %)
- Journalism: 3 (9.38 %)
- Music: 3 (9.38 %)
- Photography: 6 (18.75 %)
- Television: 0
- Theatre: 1 (3.13 %)
- Other: 6 (18.75 %)

8. (OtherVLC) If your VLC is not included in the list above, please enter it here.

- Learning Studio and PWR
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- Faculty VLC

- Faculty VLC

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- Interestingly enough, I am not a member of ANY VLC sites except for the two brand new ones that I administer (one for Liberal Arts Math faculty, and one for Science & Math Assessment). I hope this doesn't completely invalidate my input!

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- ETA Nominations, ETA Committee, NFO, CiTE Fellowships, Faculty VLC, Intro to Visual Culture

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- Program in Writing and Rhetoric

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- CiTE Tech Fellows VLC & VLC Fellows VLC [!]

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9. (MostusefulfeatureTeaching) What feature/s of the VLC have you found most useful to your teaching? Please check all that apply.

- Handouts and course documents:	25 (80.65 %)
- Links and web resources:	29 (93.55 %)
- Discussion forums:	17 (54.84 %)
- Live chats and/or	

Google hangouts: 0

- Tests and quizzes: 5 (16.13 %)

- Assignments: 17 (54.84 %)

- Grading system: 12 (38.71 %)

- Other: 1 (3.23 %)

10. (OtherFavoriteTeachingFeature) If your favorite feature/s is not included in the list above, please enter it here.

- I'm going to be brutally honest; due to staffing for the fall semester, I haven't had time to even complete my project. I wish I could have something more for you, but it's just the raw truth.

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11. (MostusefulfeatureProfessionalDev) What feature/s of the VLC have you found most useful to your professional development? Please check all that apply.

- Handouts and course documents:	18 (62.07 %)
- Links and web resources:	24 (82.76 %)
- Discussion forums:	18 (62.07 %)
- Live chats and/or Google hangouts:	1 (3.45 %)
- Tests and quizzes:	2 (6.90 %)
- Assignments:	7 (24.14 %)
- Grading system:	5 (17.24 %)
- Other:	2 (6.90 %)

12. (OtherFavoriteProfessionalFeature) If your favorite feature/s is not included in the list above, please enter it here.

- When I get to finishing the project, I will know more, but I know my learning style and both that I checked are good for me -- very good for me, actually.

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- The structure of the VLCs themselves; perusing them has been helpful not only in creating my own online resource for my VLC fellowship this year; it also has made me ponder (and pursue) more deeply the potential of online and flipped courses.

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13. (EffectofDiscussionforumsTeaching) Please describe how the discussion forums have helped with your teaching.

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- I wish the students would use them more.

- With the transition into the new foundations courses in the photography department, it was much easier to solve problems and

- Forums are wonderful ways that I can connect with my students throughout the week (when we are not in the classroom together)—via methods that are far more engaging and interactive than email. It's also a way for students to view their peers' work and comment on it... having entire (meaningful) discussions about each other's work. This allows us to really hit the ground running when we rejoin one another in class.

- Through discussion forums I have gotten ideas about how to approach some classroom situations and classroom problems. I have also gotten project ideas. I have not been able to participated in these as much as possible, see my answer below to number 23. I have always imagined the capacity to build out templates for courses and house these templates on the VLCs for multi-section courses, but the first time I saw this really well utilized was in the Introduction to Visual Culture VLC.

- The forums have been helpful for me as a place for posting news and weekly finds to share with my students. I have had a hard time stimulating student

interest in them unless I require it or have punitive consequences for not using it.

- I have not used this function of VLC yet in my teaching. I expect to use this in the future for troubleshooting student problems when delivering short / low in class contact workshops.
- I use the discussion forums to have students post their work for the rest of the class to see. Besides saving paper for those times when the class together is going to critique someone's assignment or do this in pairs, having students openly post their work encourages them to compare and contrast what they've done with others. It also sets the expectation early on for students that their work is going to be seen by more than just the teacher, which is especially important in Journalism.
-
- I'm not terribly active in the discussion forums of the VLCs. For FYS, I used the VLC as a resource for assignment and text ideas. The Faculty VLC is really just a respository and does not use the discussion forum feature.
- When colleagues raise challenging questions, it helps to consider what I might do in such a situation. Also, some faculty feel comfortable sharing resources and activities they use in their own classes that I may not otherwise come across or consider. In both cases, I feel that participation in these forms make me a better prepared and more informed instructor.
- The groups feature has allowed us to contact and target discussion forums to particular classes within our community. The forums have been used more for instructor communication with students than among the students themselves.
- Faculty forums are a great way to get out the word about a course, how to use a multi-section course page template, how to circulate materials related to the course, facilities issues specific to a course, meetings, etc. Because more faculty are participants in the VLCs than are teaching a course at a given time, and faculty from the cite or from different departments are participants, the forums help keep faculty abreast of how Moodle is being used across the college.
- see #14
- I have found that the discussion forums can be used to diversify the type of photography assignments that I give students so that they can respond to prompts with images. I feel this is beneficial because on many levels the VLC is more intimate and private a setting for displaying one's artwork than is the critique format, despite the fact that everyone in the class is enrolled to the forums. I have also used the discussion forums as a site for students to present research projects. I like this because everyone must read each other's project yet I don't have to commit valuable classroom to the listening process.
- Students are able to share ideas, insights, perspectives in an unobtrusive way. Discussions often begin with one topic but take many twists and turns, allowing students to share so much information with one another. These discussions give me ideas for new assignments, readings, and course topics.
- I have not yet had much participation from members of my VLC in the discussion forum, so I am not able to really give any ways (yet).
- The forums are excellent tools to check in to see how students are processing material they are working on in class. One can quickly see if students are using the vocabulary introduced in class, as well as if they are observing how other

students are using concepts or techniques being worked on. In the course of a discussion forum, much of the content worked on in class gets revisited through the various discussion posts and responses. This is enormously helpful in reinforcing that content--and I think students are more attentive to it when it comes from a student perspective: Peer-to-peer learning is highly effective, especially in physically-based performance courses that I usually teach.

- I have found it hard for students to get motivated to participate in it unless it is part of their grade.
- Streamlines and makes them more efficient, especially online quizzes and gradeboook. Also, allows for interaction between students through forums that is not always easy to facilitate during class time.
-
- Forums are a reality check. I get a real take on how resources are received and understood. It also give me a place to ask/answer questions.
- Giving students who identify as introverted a voice in the discussion. There is a safety online in a way that isn't always there face-to-face. That realization has been a long-time coming for me - personally, I've always craved/fed off of/been inspired by the immediacy of face-to-face discussion and activities, but the fact is that many voices get left out and that's a profound tragedy. The discussion forums allow all students to enter on the same playing field. They allow you to think through your thoughts before you hit send, to edit as need be, to reflect and clarify.

  The flip end of that argument is that we don't always do it, right? Slow down and reflect before we hit send? How can we encourage our students to do that, and to make the bridge between doing this is in a classroom forum and doing it outside of the classroom, in their day-to-day life, as they comment and contribute to blogs and other online discussions. I'm interested in what it means to be a good citizen, and subsequently what it means to be a good digital citizen. These are important life skills for our students to consider, and the online forums allow us to mirror (for lack of a better term although I ahte this term) "real life." I want them to learn how to collaborate and work with others, artistically and professionally. I want them to learn how to connect and play well with others, personally. I want them to learn how to connect and respond with others in a way that elevates the conversation and moves us forward, and that doesn't always happen in online discussion. I think the use of the discussion forums in class is a way to open those discussions.

  I want to mention that I don't think I'm facilitating these as well as I should be, and I'd like to learn to be better at it.
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- I use discussion forums to generate and enrich classroom community. I've learned a lot about how to use them via when and what types of prompts might be helpful to students, etc. by seeing how others use them in classes.
- I have not used the discussion form for my web class.
- These are the best places to openly communicate with peers and, particularly, people who are more knowledgeable than me. The informality make me feel comfortable asking questions. The function is easy to use, so I want to return. It can feel like making a real connection. It keeps me focused on larger goals.
- It's helped ask the questions that I am thinking of asking. Also, the conversations mimic face to face interactions.

- Discussion forums are most useful when they direct the user towards valuable resources, particularly those that are pedagogical in nature.

- The discussion forums have allowed me to interact in real time with colleagues and share information and receive quick feedback on topics. It has helped me shape and achieve learning objectives for a foundation course. In Introduction to Management, we are using a discussion forum for all instructors; currently it is mostly me as course supervisor, posting information that is viewed by other instructors teaching the course and less of an ongoing dialogue. There is less initiative from others at this point. I hope this becomes more of a normative behavior as part of our culture. The collaboration leads to more in-depth curriculum development and more consistency across multi-section courses.

  In other VLC discussion forums, I gain by receiving teaching tips for activity and content ideas and sharing successive strategies for learning. We are moving to departmental culture change by communicating more through these forums.

- It's helpful to hear from other CCC instructors about their strategies, questions, triumphs and frustrations regarding their courses, their students and the college's policies; it makes one feel more a part of a community (and, sometimes, of a community WITHIN a community, if that makes sense).

- Learning what other teachers have tried, or are trying, in specific class situations has been invaluable as I consider my own classroom options.

14. (EffectofDiscussionforumsProfessional) Please describe how the discussion forums have helped with your professional development.

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- There have been numerous times when a fellow FYS teacher will post an article/link/activity in a discussion forum for all to see, and then each instructor will weigh in on how those resources might help in their own classroom. This can be a refreshing "bump" in my daily lesson planning.

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- n/a

- The forums are a wonderful addition when a group working together on a training session can trouble shoot on the fly. It has also been a great tool for collecting feedback from faculty when coordinating multi-section courses and allows a level of mutual support to enter the workplace. People that don't get the opportunity to see each other face to face because of their teaching schedule are able to still feel connected to a group and this controls stress levels.

- Please see above

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- Not very much at all.

- The sharing of resources such as weblinks and articles that stimulate my thinking and reflection on my professional practice. The discussion forums create a kind of brain trust that enables a level of sharing and dialogue that is unlikely to be sustained in realtime settings.

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- Discussion forums have helped me to stay connected to faculty in my department and across the college.

- The discussion forums were an excellent way to communicate information and ideas about the class to fellow teachers without email chains.

  I believe now that we are getting familiar with the discussion forums, they will be put to more use going forward.

- The discussion forums have opened up the ways I can engage with the students on professional topics - I can easily add info, provocative questions and outside exploration assignments that don't take much time to do but are more open-ended and engaging for the students and often address their personal realities more directly in regard to photography.

- These discussion forums provide insight into research and topics of interests to our students, also exposing me to new resources that aid in my teaching and content delivery.

- I have not yet had much participation from members of my VLC in the discussion forum, so I am not able to really give any ways (yet).

- I have become more aware of consciously using terminology connected to the material being worked on in class. If I model use of terminology during in-class feedback sessions, that language tends to be reinforced in discussion forums.
  I have also found that more students become more vocal in class as a result of their participation in online discussion forums--and especially if their posts are responded to by me and/or by other students. The forums have become a vital tool in improving class discussion rates among students.
  Additionally--if student participation rates are good in online discussion forums that focus on class readings, the quality of discussion improves greatly--and concepts pulled from those readings tend to show in other forums and in-class discussions.

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- Not sure.

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- Same as above. I get some ideas or have an opportunity to consider something I haven't already.

- My teaching and my professional development are super-connected; one feeds the other. So I'd repeat everything I said above here, thinking in terms of the bridges we can build for faculty, as well as students, about facilitation of online discussion and its model of behavior and reflection, i.e. think before you type. Consider that there is a person on the other side of your computer. Would you say this to someone's face? What does tone and word choice have to do with misunderstandings? Think of all of the misunderstandings and arguments that happen because we're not truly listening to each other? It's fascinating to think how Connectivism, period, and in online learning/faculty development can influence that.

  Most of my personal use of VLC's in professional development has been as a way to access information. I don't have much experience in discussion forums outside of the classroom.

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- Similar to the note above, I've developed better understanding of varieties of ways to develop classroom community and expand my pedagogical repertoire.
- I have not used the discussion form for my web class.
- I learn something new almost every time a colleague or facilitator contributes. Even the most casual aside can reveal a strategy or skill that I hadn't known.
- My learning has been enhanced by these forums and the conversations had added to my professional knowledge and expertise.
- Same reason as above -- Forums can help advance your knowledge of particular resources and also provide an opportunity to gain knowledge that enhances your understanding of particular subjects.
- I feel like I am using 21st century communication skills and using another form of technology to engage with colleagues. I am becoming more technology proficient which allows me to continue to be relevant. The informal nature of a discussion forum encourages me to take more risks in asking questions and sharing strategies and resources about our discipline of arts management both inside and outside the classroom. My view points and boundaries are broadened by interacting with colleagues with different subject matter expertise.

  I think it helps me learn much faster. I can be exposed to articles or research on a topic rather than doing research from scratch myself. Sometimes I don't even know what I am looking for, yet when I read something that a colleague has posted, it gives me direction.
- They have helped make me a better teacher, which is a way to develop professionally, if that applies here.
- They've helped me put my own understanding of a teacher's role into a larger context ... shared goals, shared experiences.

15. (UsefulnessofsynchronousactivitiesTeaching) Please describe how live chats or Google hangouts have helped with your teaching.

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- I have not used Google chats. I do offer virtual office hours over Skype, but very few take me up on it.
- I have not used this function.
- we have not employed them
- I have not used either yet but should!

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- I have not used these in my teaching or to discuss teaching ideas.
- n/a

- The IVC Resource Center has been a way for faculty to share teaching materials and documents.
- N/A- did not use
- Don't use them yet.
- N/A
- We haven't run any live chats yet.
- I don't make regular use of this feature.
- I don't use this But would love to learn more about this.
- Never used.
- n/a
-
- I don't have a ton of experience with this. When I do live chats, it's happening less through the VLC and more through Gchat, facebook, or twitter, for the following reasons:

  Answer fast questions.
  Schedule a face-to-face meeting.
  "Hey, I just read this thing online and I thought of you, here's a link."
  "Hey, I just saw this call for submissions/contest/scholarship/show and I thought of you, here's a link."
  Quick questions or feedback on their work: "Hey, I just read your piece about Alaska and I was wondering if the girl was his daughter? Give a look to that part, it's on page 7."

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- I have not used these
- I have not used live chats or google hangout.
- I haven't used these very much, but I would. I respond really well to real time chats.

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- I have not participated in live chats nor Google hangouts.
- I have not used either for teaching.
- I haven't used these.
- I haven't used these much except to get specific questions answered.

16. (UsefulnessofsynchronousactivitiesProfessional) Please describe how live chats or Google hangouts have helped with your professional development.

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- n/a
- I have not used this function.
- Please see above
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- I have only used Google hangout once or twice in staff meetings, but have not sought it out on my own yet.
- n/a
- we have not employed them
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- N/A- did not use
- Don't use them yet.
- N/A
- We haven't run any live chats yet.
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- Never used.
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- n/a
- My experience here is pretty much nil.

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- see #15
- I have not used live chats or google hangout.
- I think that this will work and look forward to trying it.
-
- I have not participated in live chats nor Google hangouts.
- Again, I am engaging in another form of technology to communicate. I am becoming more skilled in using different technology platforms in addition to having real time communication to share information with colleagues. I am using live chats more personally than professionally currently.
- Ditto the answer to #15.
- Not quite as useful for this category.

17. (HasVLChelpedincreaseknowledge) Please describe how the VLC has helped improve your knowledge of your teaching subject matter.

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- It helps to collect all the teaching and research materials in one place.

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- The FYS team does a really nice job of populating the FYS VLC with meaningful and interesting materials. I've used quite a few of the posted activities in my own class.

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- I don't believe that it has.

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- The best part of building a VLC site is that you can store information that you can access anywhere at anytime. This helps with remembering details about subject matter especially if you are teaching several courses. Plus you don't have to reinvent course content from scratch which allows more time for finding updated content.

- It's helped me better structure my class time and to be more thoughtful about what we do in class versus outside of class. I've not completely "flipped" my class yet but have flipped some elements. Having all this information easily cataloged and retrievable has also been helpful the next semester or even years later. In some cases, I've been able to find a resource or assignment that in years past - when so much was done by paper and filing folders - would have been hard if not impossible to find. It's also been helpful for students to be able to look at pass assignments, including finding contact information for stories they had done in their journalism courses - because it's all there on Moodle.

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- Seeing other instructors' plans for specific units of the course helped me figure out how to structure my own course (pacing, activities, etc.).

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- Everyone is adding information and material to each weeks's subject. This synergy is excellent. Everyone has the same goal and now we can share our knowledge to help expand our knowledge of each weeks subject matter.

- Theoretically, it's easier for colleagues to share information but I have not found this to have a direct effect.

- The VLC allows faculty and staff, as well as students (where applicable) to share their knowledge, experience, and expertise. Rather than trying to constantly come up with new delivery methods, assignments, projects, etc, VLCs enable us to work together, virtually, to accomplish more. This is incredibly beneficial for instructors, but students as well because it strengthens the learning environment. We are able to learn from one another in terms of likes/dislikes as well as things that work/don't work in the classroom.

- Again, my VLC is so new that I haven't been able to use it for improving my own knowledge base.

- I'm not sure if the VLC has helped me improve knowledge of the subject matter I teach. Using the LMS on a regular basis has helped me develop more knowledge but the VLC itself has been more about structure and possibility in use of the LMS.

- VLC is very useful in numerous ways as we have made it as a repository for the not only the courses and also updating all the department policy, paperwork, Syllabus tempelate, Guest Lecture running list, Sharing of articles, etc

- Can bring up questions from students they may not in the classroom, thus allowing me to recognize where there are gaps in my own knowledge.

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- Not sure that it has entirely had so much affect on teaching.

- If we're talking about creative writing - nada.

  [my department has no VLC. my department is scared of technology]

  But my teaching subject matter is much wider than the specifics of my discipline. It's about professional behavior, what it means to be a good citizen online and off, where and how we access information and support. My having access to VLCs and digital culture has a huge influence in what I bring into the classroom. For example, accessing short stories, articles, youtube videos, and podcast online and then sharing them through my class Moodle page models the wealth of art that is immediately accessible, and we discuss how to search thought all of the mountains of "stuff" and find good sources, good work, art that we can learn from, places where we can submit and learn more. I want my students to see me doing this. I want them to do this. Being a creative writer no longer means publishing in esoteric journals that will only be read by like 50 people; it means connecting with millions through online journals and magazines.

  [i would really like my department to get with the f'ing program. we'll have a new chair so maybe?]

- Suggestions and resources from a wide variety of perspectives, and information and links that I might not have found on my own.

- I've managed the VLC, so I have been the person posting materials. What I have learned is through the process of researching for useful materials and figuring out how to present them clearly so faculty can find them easily.

  Getting suggestions from the faculty using the site ahs been helpful.

  i also have been challenged to expand my understanding of how to facilitate the use of and understanding of the site and its materials.

- The VLC has improved my knowledge of row subject matter because I can update the web resources daily, if needed. This was the perfect environment to teach and immerse students into the constantly changing web. There is so much information, I am able to curate the most useful links and support material for each assignment or topic.

- Surveying other instructors' VLCs shows me best practices for this mode. Just the act of navigating through the options and features paints a comprehensive picture of the work going on in these programs.

- It has given me so many more options as to how to deliver, engage and interact with students while teaching in my subject area.

- Again, anytime someone recommends or reviews a particular resource relevant to my field of expertise, that serves to enhance my knowledge in this area.

- The department VLC exposes me to subjects that are relevant in the discipline that I teach. I view articles and web links that colleagues post for other courses

that help me make connections in developing and teaching the Introduction or Foundations course. Again, it broadens my purview of the industry and helps me be more knowledgeable in arts management in general.

We specifically have a section of teaching resources and I gain general teaching tips that can be customized to the discipline I teach. By viewing additional materials, it keeps me fresh in the classroom.

- Because VLCs are about sharing materials, ideas and knowledge with certain groups of people who are thinking about the same things I am, using them as an instructor makes me dive a little deeper into my subject matter, stretch a little further to find relevant and interesting material online, and shape a little more clearly what I mean when I discuss my work and my opinions.
- That's easy. In route to finding some of the resources for the class that I've been referred to in the VLC, I've learned even more, and found more options and possibilities.

18. (Differentviewsandperspectives) Discuss how the VLC encourages different views and perspectives.

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- FYS is full of faculty from all different disciplines, so I'm lucky to engage with people of all different backgrounds on a variety of subjects. I think this is especially true when we talk about how various current events might play a role in our teaching.
- Hearing different perspectives is both encouraging and at times frightening. Sometimes I think that I am not taking enough time to consider all the possibilities that I am being presented with, and that in and of itself is daunting.
- I am not sure if it necessarily encourages expressing views and perspectives anymore than an actual classroom does. While it offers students the ability to post information to a virtual classroom accessible by their class peers, I don't feel as if this has fostered any greater breadth of views and perspectives than would occur in person.
- The forums allow faculty and students to air their opinions and receive almost instant feedback. Each party however needs to beware that the forum space should be treated as confidential for the group thus providing a "safe space" for development of ideas. Another great aspect of running a VLC is that students can contribute course content / resources during the semester as their research interests broaden.
- Because multiple people can contribute to the VLC, you can have multiple points of input, either of resources or of ideas about how to teach a particular course or topic.
- I'm not sure that it does.
- The VLC facilitates collaboration by offering a central platform for colleagues to share ideas and documents. Because the VLC uses the LMS it's more intuitive than using other third party alternatives.
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- Seeing what other teachers are doing has really given me more insight that I can bring to my class. This semester my class has really evolved into a whole new experience for me and the students. The last class was a completely different format from my first one!

- I think that it's more democratic for the students because they are being invited to participate in forums where there work stays available for the rest of class over time, which is not true in our classrooms for the most part. I also think having materials online is less top down than having everything handed to you from the teacher. It is also much easier to share materials and course plans between colleagues.

- See above

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- Since we all teach in such different content areas, it can be interesting to hear how someone has solved a problem in using Moodle without relating that back to my own, or a related subject matter. There is something kind of clinical about that which can be hugely helpful. And of course, in addition to being exposed to different content areas, we are also being exposed to different teaching methods and philosophies. The range of approaches can be eye-opening in a good way.

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- Some students are more likely to post thoughts online than express them verbally in the classroom.

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- The VLC seem kike an open source. There is no right or wrong so it seems like a safe place.

- Oh my gosh, this is huge. I'm thinking about it from two angles:

  1. How it allows students to participate in conversation, especially those who might not feel comfortable right away in the face-to-face environment. I've also found that once students feel valued within the online discussion, they're more likely to join in in-class. It's another opportunity for students to share and connect, and it keeps the conversation and connection going over the course of the week, as opposed to four-hour blocks of time and then seven days without seeing each other.

  2. The different viewpoints and perspectives it allows me to share. I can link point/counter-point articles. Through the internet, I have an archive of diverse perspectives at my fingertips - short stories, essays, films, music, think pieces, clips, TV shows, art, dance, video - and I can easily share through the VLC. I find new ones everyday, mostly via twitter, where I follow tons of publications from around the world and then save over to pinterest on "Read this" or "Watch this" boards. From there, I can share back to my class VLC based on the needs of the individual students in the room, as well as sharing work with specific students via those same social media channels.

- This in part is due to how posts are accepted and the way that participation is encouraged - an open environment that allows differing views and that is supportive of multiple perspectives deepens the understanding of the topic.

- One of the most successful aspects of the VLC early on from my point of view

was the discussion forums that we set up so that faculty could share their questions, ideas, suggestions and resources.

these forums were actively used in the first two semesters and then diminished dramatically. I'm not exactly sure why, but I find it concerning.
I wonder if somehow people began to fear that they might be judged a poor teacher if they did not pretend to know everything.

I see some resistance to these tools which harms teachers ability to improve their use of the technology they have access to and limits their ability to support their students.

- My students research a topic and find solutions, tutorials or articles and share them with the rest of the class. The makes a really rich environment.
- Well, all of the different functions allow people to contribute according to their strengths. The virtual space makes users feel less self conscious and more willing to share their truest thoughts and most creative work.
- The facilitators of these learning communities explicitly welcome different views and perspectives. Sharing one's own experience (good and bad) is part and parcel of the online learning community.
- Since all have the opportunity to participate in forum discussions and share their point of view or opinion, this maximizes the opportunity for exchange of varying views and perspectives. The VLC, ideally, should be a place where people feel free to express their own view, without fear of being judged or criticized.
- I am collaborating with a colleague on this VLC project and we have different skill sets. His background is more technical than mine and he addresses things from a much different perspective than I. This ultimately makes the process and the product more robust as our different perspectives compliment each other and force us to conduct more research and consider even more points of view. As we approach training our faculty colleagues in teaching online, we have to be aware of the variety of perspectives that exist in this population. We have found that different perspectives are not only welcome, but necessary to keep us relevant.
- I think particularly through the discussion forums (as is frequently the case elsewhere online), participants are emboldened to say from afar, as it were, what they might not feel comfortable talking about in person. This can (and indeed very often does) make for more robust discussion of an issue.
- Being semi-anonymous it easier to offer opinions and ideas.

19. (Selfreflection) Discuss how the VLC encourages you as a teacher to be self-reflective and a continual learner.

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- It helps me to organized the content of my teaching in one place I can conveniently access.
  I can see what needs to be added to different parts of my activity as a teacher.
  It also keeps track of submission of students' assignments.

-

- I think the connection with people who I would normally not interact with is really important. FYS adjuncts are fairly "silo-ed" in their approach to teaching, so having a framework where we can connect with one another is important.

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- Again, I am not sure that the VLC has affected this. I already possess these qualities and I don't see them to necessarily be enhanced by the VLC. It may be possible that by communicating certain types of updates, discoveries, and information via the VLC that I somehow exhibit these qualities to my students in a positive way that influences them. But I don't feel that it has changed my or enhanced my behavior on these subjects.

- Being able to review course content during and after the semester allows me to evaluate my teaching resources and methods. As the VLC develops there is a need to add more content / updated information so this keeps me current with the subject matter. The continual search for content gives me the opportunity to discover new information and build my knowledge base.

- There's no doubt that Moodle has encouraged me to be more thoughtful and deliberative about how I teach and making sure I'm maximizing students' learning. Being able to connect and interact with students throughout the week - not just for three hours once a week in class - has increased the amount of learning that happens, I think.

- The VLC is really the repository to share research and learn. It can be especially useful directly after meetings that relate to the content it contains.

- It always helps to have other models to adapt or learn from. I enjoy seeing what others are doing and being able to share my own successes and challenges.

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- It keeps my materials and lesson plans from getting stale or outdated. There is always new information to bring into my lesson plan or examples of other lesson plans to incorporate into mine.

- If I can easily present new research, I should. The VLC makes the presentation process fluid for me and easily accessible for students and colleagues.

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- It's great to have a place available to reflect on your work as a teacher outside of the pressure of the classroom AND outside the narrower parameters of one's home Department. The focus is on what good teaching is in a general sense in regards to technology use. If the VLC was discipline-specific I think the focus would switch to the usual departmental reality of comparing apples to apples--which can become territorial. Therefore I feel more open to discovery.

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- Allows me to take time processing posts comments/questions, rather than only answering on the fly as in the classroom.

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- Anytime you see how something is done differently, it's an eye-opener.

- I'm thinking about this from a meta-standpoint insofar as this question I'm answering right now.

I read it. I sit back and think about it. I run through different answers in my head. I start to type, and I can pause and think sentence-to-sentence. In face-to-face conversation, you rarely have that luxury of time. People are afraid of silence and someone will always fill it, whether the thought is completed or not.

In this forum, I HAVE to slow down. And think. And read carefully. Whereas often in face-to-face conversations we talk without thinking, we don't listen carefully (the face-to-face equivalent of reading carefully). We use the time someone is else is speaking to think about what we're going to say next. We interrupt each other.

And see? Just now, I read back over what I wrote. I added a few more sentences. I cut a few where I was repeated myself.

I'm learning good editing skills as I go.

- Converting content from one form to another (from in class lecture to written post for example) requires thinking about the content in another way, and how it would best be received in that format.
  Responses captured in digital form provide a clearer picture over time of challenges faced by students, and by those instructing.

- When people feel comfortable asking questions and asking for help and offering their insights, this is the best scenario.

  These aspects support faculty development.

  In my work facilitating courses among faculty I see this also.

- In photography and graphic design, there are so many ways to execute one result. I am aware that to teach students today, I need to be flexible enough to accept alternative routes. I also have to be open to learning along side of the students as technology changes. For the web class, I often assigned students to explore other options and share them. With software based classes, student have to be able to fish on their own for answers so they can create with the tools.

- It demands or, expects, change. I like the fact that we learn how to edit and can update or shift the resources in order to experiment or to correct errors. The structure encourages evolution. I can see my work in a way that I can't when it only happens in an isolated classroom.

- Again, reflecting on one's personal experiences as a teacher and having that perspective welcomed and reciprocated by others in the learning community encourages a self-reflective attitude as well as the permission to be a continual learner.

- Participation in a VLC inherently fosters reflection, which contributes to self-knowledge and better understanding of one's motivations for the type of teaching strategies we utilize in the classroom and our overall philosophy of teaching. This, of course, contributes to life-long learning, at least in the context of teaching.

- Developing a VLC specifically to help other colleagues learn to teach online is really challenging me in a great way. I am being stretched to use the technology that I am asking others to embrace. My proficiency in building content through assignments, discussion forums and quizzes is really growing. I find my self more curious and receptive to learn and my viewpoints about Millennials and technology has changed for the positive. I have signed up for online courses myself to remain in "student" mode and keep learning. If I can speak from the

student perspective as well, it helps me remain more relevant.

- In terms of the VLC I've co-created (with my fellowship partner, Jon Ziomek), that process has really pushed me to search for the best, most effective content and structure and always to refine (or think about refining) my work so that it can remain fresh and dynamic in an ever-changing online learning/teaching environment.
- Yes, I think this is true. Am I doing this as well as others? Oh, here's something I should consider trying in class. Hey, there's a good video I could show the students.

  These are musings I've considered because of the VLC. Considering Next Steps for a class with the assistance of others who've gone through those same considerations makes me feel more like a member of a team with a common goal.

20. (Fearoftechnology) Describe how the VLC has made you reflect on any concerns or fears you may have about the use of technology in the classroom.

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- I don't have any concerns about technology in the classroom. VLC's have helped me promote to my colleagues the merits of technology and how it can support the teaching environment.
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- I'm not an early adopter. It takes me a little time to work up to learning a new technological tool. Once I make up my mind to do it, I'm a fast learner and pretty self sufficient. If I have a compelling reason to use Google hangouts, I will seek out those who can teach me how to use it with greater proficiency.
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- N/A- I continue to be very positive and proactive about bringing in (new) technology into the classroom.
- I fear a completely online class - I believe most learners need a real classroom, a real (non-virtual) community. But my experience with using a VLC as a support system for a real classroom has had no downside.
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- Mostly I'd say I've been inspired by the use other faculty are making of the LMS

in their classrooms, so it has made me more confident it the use of technology. Since I teach performance-based classes I've always had a bit of doubt about how technology can support the learning process. But I've seen such a broad use of technology in the work of other faculty and have witnessed how use of the LMS can support reflection and feedback as well as providing resources to students quickly and at their convenience. Use of the LMS is clearly a necessity in contemporary education, and is likely to become more valuable as faculty and students discover new ways to use it. One has to keep up with current trends, especially when one can see the value in them.

- I love technology and VLC is very user friendly
- Not sure.
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- Nothing really.
- When you see how much easier they make things, it's impossible not to not only get onboard, but to sing the f'ing praises.

  Some specific examples:

  Running the ETA Committee through a VLC. All the information we need is neatly organized, a one-stop shop of upload/download. Before, we printed out thousands of hard copies of materials, fighting with copy machines and staplers, and ran them by courier around the college to committee members.

  The Intro to Visual Culture VLC in Art +Design. What a wonderful resource for faculty! What a model of how to run a multi-sectioned class with a diverse faculty, many of whom are part-time and can't attend every meeting because of other obligations.

  The Faculty VLC that we share at NFO. We used to give all of that information ALOUD, via talking heads who stood on stage and talked for HOURS, resulting in information overload and fatigue. Now it's like: hey. Look at this. It's right here, everything you need.
- Some fears that still persist:
  1) Lost connection/software unavailable. If all the information for the class is stored online and is inaccessible, having a backup of the data on disk or printed is important.
  2) The "feeling" or "vibe" in the room when students are understanding, having "a ha!" moments, or when the class is connecting well. How can that be replicated by a virtual class? Examples from David Noffs in his online Moodle course have shown that some of this feeling can still be captured in discussion forums and other types of students posts, and perhaps the online experience in some ways can provide a better guide of how well the students are understanding the material (some students have mentioned that in class they feel uncomfortable speaking up if they feel they are the only ones not understanding).
  3) Many students who seek degrees in programming, game design, etc. at our institution have less finesse with in-person social interactions. These social skills are important for most graduates, but particularly for those who will be working in teams, attending meetings, and interviewing in person. Working online and virtually for these students is easier in many respects because that is how they interact socially (forums, multi-player games, etc). Meeting and working in in-person teams is essential to prepare them for their careers. However the less stressful virtual interaction may be better for these students in certain courses so that they can focus more on the material to be learned.

4) Online courses seem to be much more work intensive for the instructor. What ways are there to balance out the workload or to compensate instructors (particularly part-time faculty) for the additional commitment?
5) Online teaching seems to be more successful when the teacher is proactive and responds quickly and in detail. How well does online teaching work with teaching styles that might not be so socially active or detailed in response?

- Discussions with other faculty members figuring things out and sharing their insights as they go along is the most powerful thing to address this.
- I don’t have fears about technology int he classroom, I am really open to it.
- Well, you just jump right in. Because the facilitators are so encouraging and the technology is user-friendly, we learn early on that experimenting is 'safe.' You can't break it. We are meant to experience trial and error, which alleviates fear. It doesn't take too long to learn how to do things correctly. I have also learned that students respond well to this virtual community. Seeing their comfort and participation strengthens my own confidence.
- It has opened up the opportunity to share your fears about technology and the level of comfort (or discomfort) you may have. This is a powerful and very positive dynamic to realize that your fears are shared by others and that we can overcome them together.
- Participation in a VLC can help one realize that many others share the same concerns, fears, and frustrations related to use of technology in the classroom.
- Working on this project has transformed me from a reticent technology user to an advocate!
  I am significantly less afraid and am now curious. Even when I have a technology failure, I ask students and colleagues for help trouble-shooting and always find ways to make technology part of what we are learning, bot in and out of the classroom. Using technology more in the classroom fosters ongoing conversation outside of the classroom.
- Teaching, as I do, a rather prosaic subject, I find that using more technology in the classroom has enhanced the instructional experience considerably; the VLC is part of that positive change, and each new aspect I master about it increases my comfort level with using technology generally and in the classroom particularly.
- I haven't really had these.

21. (InfluencesofothersinVLC) Please describe any interaction with others in the VLC that has lead to new teaching habits or practices by yourself or in your department.

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- As I said before, I've used many teaching resources that have been posted in the FYS VLC within my own classroom activities. Additionally, I've had the opportunity to be clued in on some happenings/activities/perspectives that I would not otherwise have come into contact with.
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- The support of the CITE VLC has been exponentially effective in the roll out of new foundation curriculum and the retraining of faculty. The Foundations VLC has allowed under-skilled faculty to quickly pick up new skills that enhance their teaching capabilities for the department. The grading systems and also the general interface of the VLC sites have allowed the introduction of a more consistent approach of multi-section instruction and assessment.
- None come to mind.
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- The discussion forums in the FYS VLC are not terribly active. The most helpful interactions with others have been face to face for me.
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- When doing my lesson plan, I look to see if anyone has added any material to that section. It could be new articles, a lesson plan, or videos. I also added my lesson plan to the site a couple of times. I feel this strengthens my lesson plan for the week.
- A friend described her use of on-line forums and I was inspired to use them as described above and I'm quite pleased with how this went.
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- I think seeing how other faculty have used the LMS to support peer-to-peer interaction and group projects has been most useful to me. This feels like the most effective way to keep students engaged in the work of the class. I am still navigating how to structure that kind of learning in my own classrooms. In some areas it has been very effective. In other areas, more experimentation and thought is needed.
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- Not sure.
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- The one I run has high traffic with lots of participants so there is always something new to consider and evaluate. It allows curriculum to be dynamic.
- Nada in my department. I want to scream OMG.

  But tons and tons for me. My class lives online and in-person. It lives all week long, not only for four hours on Wednesdays. My students built a class facebook page off of our Moodle page when the class was over, and they still talk on it, everyday. It's a tool for community-building. It's a tool for clarity: I no longer receive emails saying, What was the assignment? It's all right there on the Moodle page, and students can connect with each other quicker than with me. I'll see questions fly through my facebook feed, tagging other students, and the answers are given by others in the room, giving them ownership of the knowledge, and I can jump in to clarity as necessary.

  I still need to be better, and faster, with my skill set in Moodle. I need more practice... building the site, and adding to the site, still takes me a lot of time, but that's okay because it saves me time in the long run. I need to be more

forward-thinking about prep time, and that's a GOOD thing. It makes me, per the above question, more reflective.

- Feedback to students more often, and in more detail. Written feedback that they can reflect on instead of primarily verbal feedback.

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- n/a

- Mostly, I have borrowed ideas and resources shared by others. I learn aesthetic techniques for curriculum design and many other affordances of the functions. A VLC also helps in a flipped classroom, where material is available for students to take ownership of.

- I think I have been embolden by the courage of others in the learning community to try incorporate more technology into the teaching experience, for example, forums, wikis, and podcasts.

- Some of the faculty who were designing and teaching online courses for the first incorporated elements of a course that I had been teaching for a few years in their own course design and strategy. They had access to my course to serve as a model.

- I have developed a few habits and picked up tips from others in this process. One is how to use reports more efficiently in a course. Another is how to use discussion forums bot quantitatively and qualitatively.

- The VLC we've created for our department is new, so there's not much to describe yet—though I have high hopes of being able to do so in the not-too-distant future!

- More than a year ago, I had help from another instructor in setting up discussion sites for the students. This has become a regular part of my classes now.

22. (PreviousOnlineCommunityExperienceYes) Have you had any previous experience with online learning communities?

- Yes: 9 (37.50 %)
- No: 15 (62.50 %)

23. (PreviousOnlineExperience) If you answered yes to the previous question, please describe how this has affected your use of online resources and activities.

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- Same response as #21:

  As I said before, I've used many teaching resources that have been posted in the FYS VLC within my own classroom activities. Additionally, I've had the opportunity to be clued in on some happenings/activities/perspectives that I would not otherwise have come into contact with.

- Honestly, I feel that I am behind the curve on much of this. I look to colleagues like Whitney Huber with great admiration because she navigates the online environment so easily. I often get bogged down in honing or rewriting a

sentence. Even in texting I am frustrated with misspellings for example, and auto-correct on my iPhone infuriates me at times. I use voice recognition where possible, but even setting that up is difficult at times. I feel that Skype and webinars provide a more synchronous experience.

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- They have broaden the content I can use and deliver in class. When in full flight they allow me to retain a good level of contact with my students and faculty, especially when operating in a large department.

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- I like using online resources, I like the ease of availability and shareability.

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- N/A not counting Columbia's Moodle.

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- Once you have the experience, you want it to continue.

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- Previous online learning community involvement was more one-way and was used primarily as resource sites (versus dialogues).

- All of my recent experience has been with CiTE. Having learned earlier versions of Moodle and witnessed great teachers maximizing its potential, I have only increased my confidence in and fondness for the technology and practice.

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- I had no experience with online learning communities before I taught at CCC.

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24. (SocialNetworkingSites) What social networking sites do you use as a part of your teaching? Select all that apply.

- None: 8 (33.33 %)
- Twitter: 8 (33.33 %)
- Facebook: 9 (37.50 %)
- LinkedIn: 4 (16.67 %)
- Pinterest: 3 (12.50 %)
- Google +: 2 (8.33 %)
- Other: 5 (20.83 %)

25. (OtherSocialNetworking) If your social networking site is not included above, please enter it here.

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- Instagram
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- YouTube
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- moodle site
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- YouTube?
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- dropbox
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- Instagram
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- basecamp , which is not really a social network
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- Vine, Instagram, Tumblr, WordPress, Cowbird, SoundCloud

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- Google Docs

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26. (SocialNetworkIntegration) Explain how you have integrated social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, or others into your teaching?

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- Facebook helps to reach students much faster then campus e-mail.

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- In a self identity exercise, I had students take photos that represented their identity via Instagram. Then, I assigned a class hashtag that everyone used when uploading the photos. I then found an html widget that allowed me to compile everyone's photos into a grid format onto Moodle. It was a great way to view our "class identity."
- I have used Twitter once in teaching, while co-teaching with Lott Hill some years ago, and we used it as a research tool for students researching the 2008 presidential elections.

  I've use Google docs to give students direct feedback into their documents and insert comments, etc. It has not always been as effective as I would like.
- n/a
- I only use Moodle at the moment for teaching. I use Facebook for news feeds to students although this is becoming less effective as the new generation shifts it's interest away from this platform. I use Linkedin for consolidating professional connections. I have just started using YouTube to create play lists to share content with students.
- Social media sites are used to point out important news stories to students, who take current affairs news quizzes. I've also used it to help students find sources for their stories and to determine what the "hot" topics are at any one time.

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- N/A. I've primarily used the LMS for connecting students online.

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- We have created a new site and attempted to generate social interest using a moodle page. An events calendar has been the most popular focus, though posting of student online presence in forums has helped as well.

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- I bring up social media in many of the lesson plans (career, marketing, etc). I also scourge them to exchange social media contact info in order to grow their

network and to reach out with class related questions to each other (if they missed a day or to help with their team activities).

Also, I have them upload any examples they want to add to the discussion to YouTube, or any projects they are working on outside of class. I used it a lot this year. Just two examples: One student uploaded a demo of the video game he is working on. Others uploaded parts of their group presentation.

- Have not.
- Pinterest: Allows students to create theme boards as a group to bring ideas to life. They can work remotely or face-to-face.
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- I am not a very active social media user myself so the format does note feel fully comfortable for me as a teaching tool.
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- Students use facebook groups to manage projects and communicate to one another.
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- I've talked about this a little bit already, but to add to it:

  I teach a class called Story and Performance, that's based on live performance, and we go to lots of live shows in the city. So much of this world of publicity, tickets, showtimes, etc. runs on social media, so I wanted to show students how to navigate that. So we had a facebook page, and it was GREAT: we shared shows, calls for submissions, cheap ticket sales, etc. Students would post to facebook things like: "I'm here at X show that starts in a half hour and my date didn't show and I have an extra ticket!" and someone would see it FAST, 'cause it's on facebook and everyone is on it all the time, and would comment: "I can be there in twenty minutes." It was awesome to see.

  We had a class hashtag for twitter and instagram, for sharing articles and shows and video clips. we talked about who to follow and why. We talked about social media behavior: one show that we went to, for example, asked for phones to be turned off at the start. Another showed the show's hashtag at the beginning and encouraged live tweeting throughout the performance.
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- I mentor a group of photographers and designers to develop and create content for a magazine. This is such a project based class, that I use project management software called basecamp. In basecamp, we use a thread discussion that can be attached to files so we are all on the same page with content and deadlines. We are also able to assign to-do's to each team member. This has been really helpful.
- I simply create opportunities for writing to be produced and edited on these sites. Students might respond to a writing prompt in a traditional essay as well as two other modes. They are encouraged to maximize its potential to be shared with hashtags, tags, or other shares. We get into digital storytelling where they can supplement their stories with sound, visuals and film. We'll do

in class exercises that involve compressing larger ideas into more limited output, for experimentation purposes and to discuss the affordances of various media. Everything our program does right now involves asking the question: what is writing in the 21st century?

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- N/A

- When working on projects, I now allow students to organize their information in Google Drive/Docs and Facebook. I also now use Twitter to expand conversations and the content in leadership and management topics. I created a course hashtag and students are content contributors. Twitter has tags allow for information curation and cross-curriculum connections and com munition across multi-section courses.

- I use Twitter to teach the students in my editing class to "write tight," as we say in the journalism biz; those 140 characters help with that goal!
  Also, I ask them to follow the Twitter accounts of reputable news outlets and to retweet stories that catch their interest throughout the week, commenting on (in replies) their classmates' story choices, as well. My goal here is to help my students, through a mode that is second nature to most of their generation, keep their fingers on the news pulse, to feel its ebb and flow, its steady rhythm. (Believe it or not, though they are self-selected journalism students, this otherwise is harder for many of them to do on their own than you might think!)

- I don't use them much except as examples of the ease of transmitting information without checking its accuracy.

27. (Additionalcomments) Please describe anything else about your VLC experience that we have not asked you in this survey but you think we should know.

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- It made me more aware about the importance of web presence.

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- I think it is important for institutions that are using VLC's not to introduce too much at one time especially when they have an aging faculty. A well constructed roll out plan is essential for the VLC to gain traction within the wider community of the institution. There must also be a contingency for supporting the implementation of a VLC with specialized instructional design support staff to ensure the stability and continuance of a VLC especially when dealing with multi-section courses.

- I wish more faculty and students used Moodle!

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- It is great, keep up the good work!

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- Have I mentioned that my department isn't onboard yet?
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  I want to learn more. I'll be taking David's online class shortly, but for the most part it's practice, practice, practice.

- The examples of leaders (particularly David Noffs and Brian Shaw) have been inspirational and successfully modeled aspects of online teaching that I had been unsure of previously.

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- Thank you!

- I absolutely love finding out about new VLCs that I can ask to be added to. If there was a way to auto-enroll interested parties into the new, cool VLCs that you're aware of, we would seize those opportunities to learn and grow. I am interested in doing more to check that my work is consistent with others across the college. If there were more occasions for departments to...not standardize, but make sure we're operating in the same ballpark, that would be great.

- I have truly experienced community in terms of shared goals and interests in ways that are not even available with my face to face colleagues. The level of sharing and intimacy is heartening and encourages a high level of trust and interconnectedness that I found surprising especially given that this was a virtual community populated by a number of folks that I had never actually met in person.

- I think VLCs have great potential for impacting the quality of online teaching, by enriching the knowledge and skills of instructors, as well as providing the opportunity for reflective thinking and meaningful exchange among faculty participants. However, they do not fulfill the need for and should not be viewed as a substitute for effective support (particularly technical and technological support) which is critical to provide to instructors involved in online instruction.

- It continues to be a fabulous experience!

- I can't think of anything at the moment; the survey was very thorough. :-)

- The key to success of a VLC is getting all the instructors for a particular class to participate in the VLC. How to guarantee that isn't known to me. My partner and I have actively, repeatedly, encouraged others. The department administrators have buy into what a VLC is doing because they have the

leverage to increase the teacher participation.