

Current Issues in Emerging eLearning

Volume 3

Issue 1 *MOOC Design and Delivery: Opportunities and Challenges*

Article 3

April 2016

How the Community Became More Than the Curriculum: Participant Experiences In #RHIZO14

Sarah Honeychurch

University of Glasgow, sarah.honeychurch@glasgow.ac.uk

Bonnie Stewart

University of Prince Edward Island, bstewart@upei.ca

Maha Bali

American University of Cairo, bali@aucegypt.edu

Rebecca J. Hogue

University of Ottawa

Dave Cormier

University of Prince Edward Island

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/ciee>



Part of the [Instructional Media Design Commons](#), and the [Online and Distance Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Honeychurch, Sarah; Stewart, Bonnie; Bali, Maha; Hogue, Rebecca J.; and Cormier, Dave (2016) "How the Community Became More Than the Curriculum: Participant Experiences In #RHIZO14," *Current Issues in Emerging eLearning*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 3. Available at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/ciee/vol3/iss1/3>

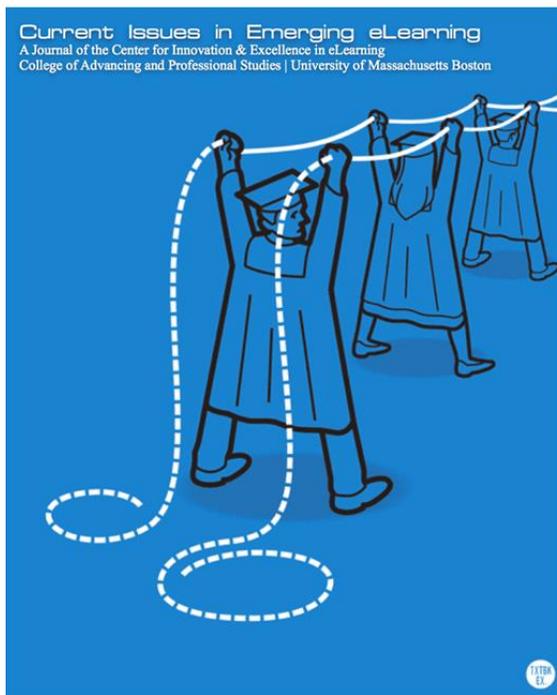
This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Current Issues in Emerging eLearning by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact libraryuasc@umb.edu.

CURRENT ISSUES IN EMERGING eLEARNING

Special Issue on MOOC Design and Delivery: Opportunities and Challenges

Volume 3, Issue 1 (2016/04)

ISSN: 2373-6089



Volume 3, Issue 1

Special Issue on MOOC Design and Delivery: Opportunities and Challenges

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Alan Girelli,

University of Massachusetts Boston

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Apostolos Koutropoulos,

University of Massachusetts Boston

SPECIAL THANK YOU

Leslie P. Limon, copy editor
and revision advisor

JOURNAL COVER IMAGE BY:

Textbook Example,
under Creative Commons licensing.
More work by Textbook example at:
<http://textbookexample.com/>

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Current Issues in Emerging eLearning is an
Open Access Journal licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution -
Non Commercial - No Derivatives 4.0 International License.



Available online at: <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/ciee/>

HOW THE COMMUNITY BECAME MORE THAN THE CURRICULUM: PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES IN #RHIZO14

Sarah Honeychurch

Bonnie Stewart

Maha Bali

Rebecca J. Hogue

Dave Cormier

University of Glasgow

University of Prince Edward Island

American University of Cairo

University of Ottawa

University of Prince Edward Island

ABSTRACT

The paper outlines participant experiences in a rhizomatic MOOC, #rhizo14. We begin with a brief outline of the structure of the course before presenting our five participant narratives to illustrate our beliefs that, for us, the #rhizo14 community became more than the curriculum. We then discuss some of the common themes in our narratives: the role that the Facebook group held in fostering our feelings of community, how the diversity of voices in the course promoted learning and engagement of group members, the formation of sub-communities with diverse interests, and the flexibility of participation that the course encouraged. While acknowledging the partiality of our narratives, we conclude that the emphasis in #rhizo14 on contribution and creation rather than content mastery encouraged a sense of “eventedness” (shared experience), which allowed our community to thrive.

Keywords: rhizomatic learning, MOOC, cMOOC, connectivism, rMOOC

HOW THE COMMUNITY BECAME MORE THAN THE CURRICULUM: PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES IN #RHIZO14

Sarah Honeychurch ⁱ	University of Glasgow
Bonnie Stewart ⁱⁱ	University of Prince Edward Island
Maha Bali ⁱⁱⁱ	American University of Cairo
Rebecca J. Hogue ^{iv}	University of Ottawa
Dave Cormier ^v	University of Prince Edward Island

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we outline participant experiences in #rhizo14, a participatory open online course offered without formal institutional affiliation or corporate umbrella, facilitated by Dave Cormier, one of the people recognized for coining the term Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). Formally titled “Rhizomatic Learning: The Community is the Curriculum,” #rhizo14 ran in January and February 2014, and was the first in a series of at least two iterations of the course (a third is planned for May 2016). It was designed to explore ideas of peer- and network-driven learning, based on the decentered connection-building of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizome metaphor. Precursors to this type of course include the first connectivist MOOCs offered by Siemens and Downes and later co-facilitated by Cormier.¹ As had been the case with these previous connectivist MOOCs (cMOOCs), #rhizo14 (a rhizomatic MOOC, or rMOOC) was organized via a variety of platforms: P2PU (a MOOC platform), a Facebook group, a Twitter hashtag, a Google Plus group, and Cormier’s blog. Cormier encouraged participants to distribute engagement across their own blogs and other platforms. Approximately 500 people signed up for #rhizo14 (Cormier, 2014b, para. 2), hailing from a wide range of locations, cultural backgrounds, and professional roles. Cormier’s goal for #rhizo14 was to enact and model the rhizomatic learning approach. Rhizomatic learning is “a story of how we can learn in a world of abundance” (Cormier, 2014a, para. 3).

The course design of #rhizo14 is noteworthy. In cMOOCs that predate #rhizo14, course content is organized around content pre-set by the course instructor(s)/facilitator(s). However, for #rhizo14, Cormier did not prepare the curriculum and content in advance. Instead, as facilitator, he watched as

¹ For a brief discussion of connectivism see <http://www.learning-theories.com/connectivism-siemens-downes.html>

participants chose from content already available on the web and repackaged that to suit themselves, or created their own content and interacted with each other's original or curated content. Cormier explained his operating assumptions for the course design as follows:

In the rhizomatic model of learning, curriculum ... is constructed and negotiated in real time by the contributions of those engaged in the learning process. This community acts as the curriculum, spontaneously shaping, constructing, and reconstructing itself and the subject of its learning in the same way that the rhizome responds to changing environmental conditions (Cormier, 2008, Rhizomatic Model of Education section, para. 1).

Intended as a free, six-week exploration of rhizomatic learning, #rhizo14 was structured around weekly questions and distributed discussions of emergent issues. Cormier issued an invitation to participate on his blog (Cormier 2013). There was no content delivery *per se* beyond short weekly video introductions to each question; videos were posted on the P2PU pages. (See Cormier 2013 for a link to this course design.) Participants constructed the curriculum of the course as they engaged with the questions and with each other. At its conclusion (Cormier, 2014b), Cormier referred to #rhizo14 as an event, in keeping with his previously articulated concept of “eventedness,” or the “‘shared event’ that takes learning beyond a simple knowledge transaction between student and instructor” (Cormier, 2009). Course questions focused on commonplace concepts to which participants had differing and deeply felt responses. One example of a prompt question Cormier posed reads as follows: “Is books making us stupid?”, an ironic and provocative play on Nicholas Carr’s (2008) oft-quoted “Is Google making us stupid?” rhetoric. Find directly below a full list of topics Cormier seeded into the #rhizo14 course:

- Week 1—Cheating as Learning
- Week 2—Enforcing Independence
- Week 3—Embracing Uncertainty
- Week 4—Is Books Making Us Stupid?
- Week 5—Community as Curriculum
- Week 6—Planned Obsolescence (Cormier 2014b)

The extent to which #rhizo14 succeeded was something of a surprise to Cormier. Given the diversity of perspectives and the way the course was distributed over multiple platforms, the possibility of #rhizo14 devolving into chaos was real. Yet among a group of participants, most of whom were unknown to one another prior to the start of the course, what emerged were sustained channels for meta-discussions—and heated debate—about community, learning, and dissemination in an era of knowledge abundance. We suggest that one

criterion for determining if or when “eventedness” or “community as curriculum” occurred would be evidence of participants taking ownership of the conversation, either by continuing it after the end of the “official” course, or by introducing new topics of conversation without consulting the facilitator. Both of these occurred during #rhizo14. The Facebook group (which consisted of around 300 members) continued to thrive for more than a year, dissolving only when Cormier offered #rhizo15. Discourse in this Facebook group in particular moved beyond formal interactions to in-depth meaning-making and engagement among many participants. As we interpret the #rhizo14 experience, this course did not end when the facilitator brought it to a close at the end of the six-week term. Rather, the “community as curriculum” theme manifested to such an extent that participants continued to facilitate and engage discussions even without Cormier. Cormier himself noted, “[a]fter my last goodbye was sent out to the participants, a ‘Week 7’ popped up on the website” (Cormier, 2014c, section Zombie MOOC para. 1). We argue that #rhizo14 was a successful example of Fullan’s (2012) framework for the educational use of technologies: “The integration of technology and pedagogy to maximize learning must meet four criteria. It must be irresistibly engaging; elegantly efficient (challenging but easy to use); technologically ubiquitous; and steeped in real-life problem solving” (p. 33).

NARRATIVES

The most useful way to show how interactions in #rhizo14 embodied the community as curriculum theme will be to present, then analyse, our own participant narratives. When the five of us decided to write this paper, we first wrote our own sections without sight of the others, then we added them to a collaborative document when each of us was happy with our own narrative.

Dave Cormier:

#Rhizo14 was the first open course I’ve started on my own. Most MOOCs I’ve worked on have been run by groups, and while there are definite collaborative advantages there, you also end up reverting to norms for agreement. Here, I had the chance to really try something new, to test the community as curriculum model. The goal was to create a sense of “eventedness,” i.e. a sense of something happening that might spark the “‘shared event’ that takes learning beyond a simple knowledge transaction between student and instructor” (Cormier, 2009).

I wanted the course to be distributed, with multiple platforms and sites of engagement, and I wanted those platforms to be under the control of participants, not only me. So I sought people out and offered up the controls over Google Plus and Facebook, as community platforms. I think the fact that the Facebook group has been the primary site of #rhizo14 continuing long after the course has a lot to do with me not having any kind of final say over that site. If we see open courses

as native to the internet, and we don't need to prove that we're transmitting/negotiating content or providing approved structures, we're free to do things in different ways.

The course was pretty much the opposite of the Khan Academy model of delivering tidy little pieces of content to chew on. Instead, the people who participated took it in particular directions and gave it its flavor and its shape. This was possible because #rhizo14 had no institutional ties or obligations. There's no credential at the end, and no expectation that every participant should have the same outcome. The institutional stamp on course content legitimizes it, makes it look as if it's important from some kind of neutral perspective, whereas when I was saying, "Hey, come explore this with me!" that's a different thing, a different social contract.

In the first week, I made some attempt to be a teacher, to do summative responses, pull together themes then I realized that was counter to my intentions for the course. So I decided to pull back, and luckily people were willing, for the most part, to accept that. Now, of course, this doesn't exactly decenter me: in discussions, people sought out what had been written on rhizomatic learning and I've written a sizeable chunk of that content, so that affected the discourse that circulated in the course. And the weekly video questions still reinforced a fairly-centralized power position. But I saw the invitation to the course as an invitation to a party: I said, "I have this sandbox that I've been building castles in and I'd like you to come over and play." While I thought people would go home from the party after six weeks, many didn't ... that's great. The shared experience has done its job. It raises all kinds of important questions about belonging and ownership in an age of abundance, which is what rhizomatic learning should do, as far as I'm concerned.

Sarah Honeychurch:

I'd signed up for a few xMOOCs before #rhizo14, but never engaged, partly because the delivery was too rigid, and partly because of unfamiliarity with the platforms—despite good intentions, I'd forget to return. I was keen to participate in #rhizo14 because I have a background in philosophy and welcomed the chance to talk to others about Deleuze and Guattari, but I still found it hard to remember to log into P2PU. However, I didn't need to because #rhizo14 had a Facebook group and that was where the majority of my interactions with the #rhizo14 community took place. Junco (2011) suggests that this type of use of Facebook can be beneficial to student learning, and it definitely was for me.

The main difference between #rhizo14 and my other MOOC experiences was that participation was effortless—it was merely an extension of my everyday life (Clark 2012). I'm always logged into Facebook—it's the first tab I open in the morning and the last one I close at night. I use Facebook groups to support

undergraduates and I have regular academic conversations with my friends, while at the same time chatting to my family and looking at pictures of cats. I've stopped feeling guilty about possible procrastination and begun to appreciate that my online life is an important part of my identity. I know that some people like to make a sharp delineation between their work and personal interactions; I find it impossible to compartmentalise my life in such a way. One feature of the #rhizo14 group that inadvertently contributed to this was that it was an open Facebook group. This meant that my Facebook friends who were not members of the group were able to see threads I had commented upon in their newsfeeds. I welcomed this as it drew even more diverse voices into the conversation—particularly as my “real life” friends would initiate conversations about #rhizo14 in face-to-face meetings.

A particular richness of #rhizo14 for me was that, unlike my newsfeed or many other groups I belong to, there was a diversity of voices within the group with a range of very different opinions. I felt there was an unspoken etiquette within the group to respect others even while you might not agree with them. I found myself open to listening to points of view that, at first glance, were antithetical to my own world-view and, instead of dismissing them, taking them seriously. Sometimes I found that I changed my mind about what I believed as a result, other times we begged to differ; at all times I felt that I had learned more as a result of the exchanges. Importantly, there was no need to reach a consensus: It was acknowledged that contradictory points of view could and would exist within the same community. #Rhizo14 has now become the academic community I belong to (as, for example, Ljepava et al (2013) use this concept) and it's my first point of call when I need help or support.

Maha Bali:

#Rhizo14 is the learning community I could not have face-to-face, marked by open expectations of participation and interaction, but more importantly, a willingness to discuss education from different perspectives. As a group, many of us probably lean towards dissenting from tradition, challenging the status quo. The first topic of “cheating as learning” was provocative, and I imagine that it attracted people who were eager or at least willing to turn our most entrenched educational ideas/ideals upside down. Topics of later weeks also challenged us to break out of hegemonic ways of thinking, yet to remain critical of our own radicalness. I think the topics helped, but it was the diversity of approaches and responses within the community that promoted my learning through #rhizo14. It stopped being a “course” for me early on. It was a professional development experience that later became a community I could fall back on for both professional and personal topics.

I have asked myself: What was new and special about #rhizo14? Barriers to entry were low: There were no long videos or required readings (only Dave's blogpost and five-minute video) but I ended up reading so much more in terms of other participants' blogposts, links, and conversations on blogs and Facebook. We had participants who registered part-way and became central contributors, people who participated via Twitter tangentially, and people who joined the Facebook group after the course was over and integrated smoothly. Face-to-face, it is much more difficult to enter a room full of strangers who know each other and have no one to talk to. Early on, Dave encouraged us to find others who had not connected yet, and start talking to them. As educators, I felt many took that to heart throughout the course and beyond.

Most #rhizo14 participants were social-media-literate/competent educators: It would probably have been different if we had never used social media before and were not thinking regularly about pedagogical issues and how technology influences human and social interaction and learning. cMOOCs cannot scale well for people not digitally literate about social media (Bali, 2014) .

Quite quickly, #rhizo14 Facebook became my "homebase": If I was taking another MOOC, attending an online conference, I wanted to know who from #rhizo14 was doing the same, and to discuss it with them. I could talk to my face-to-face colleagues during our workday, but I could carry on a continuous conversation with #rhizo14 via Facebook or Twitter and have it carry over any time of day or night because of the time zone diversity. #rhizo14 is the community that is "always there," doing it by choice.

Bonnie Stewart:

#Rhizo14 was designed and run during six weeks of a rather long winter. I live with Dave, #rhizo was his project, and while interested, I hadn't really intended to participate. But #rhizo14 pulled me in by offering something that went far beyond the content of the course: It fostered an active, open inquiry and discussion space that has become a core learning community for me—a constellation of invigorating conversations—for issues of online education and knowledge.

It was Facebook that made the difference, to my surprise: When Dave first created the Facebook group, he invited me in to test how it worked. Then, early in the course, someone dug up and shared an old blog post of mine on rhizomatic learning. An extensive conversation ensued, and because the course "recognized" my name as a group member, I got an update each time anyone contributed to the thread. The intersection of lively discussion and repeated signalling eventually drew me into the conversation: I was literally "interpolated" (Althusser, 1971) or called into being as a participant in the group. The technology itself shaped my sense of belonging to the course by making #rhizo14 a constant, ambient, learning-focused presence in my daily social space.

What kept me there was the people, and the sense of something emerging that I hadn't seen before. I have seldom had the opportunity to engage in such open, exploratory, choral conversations with such a diversity of peer participants. The Facebook group was highly relational and interactive, rich in what Tu and McIssac (2002) call social presence, or the "measure of the feeling of community that a learner experiences in an online environment" (p. 131). The fact that questions were the only central structure in #rhizo14 encouraged this sense of social presence: Once "right answers" are off the educational table, conventional teacher/student roles get opened up and people are free to engage, lead, and explore according to their strengths and interests. Sometimes I posted multiple times in a single day, without feeling I was taking up too much space. Other times, I went days without feeling obliged to check in, because there was a critical mass of voices always ready to take conversations in new directions. The geographic and cultural diversity of these leading voices was a new experience in itself: Daily opportunities to talk through complex educational issues in a context where dominant contributors come from as far afield as Guyana, Scotland, Egypt, the Philippines, and France are, sadly, rare for me. I don't want to idealize this diversity; the majority of participants were still North America- and UK-based, and conversation was entirely in English, but it was nonetheless the most culturally distributed learning conversation I've experienced in fifteen years in international and online education. It was also one in which women's voices were often in the lead, which in the area of educational technologies is still unusual.

Rebecca Hogue:

January was a busy time, so I decided to lurk in #rhizo14. I was drawn to it when Dave Cormier mentioned it over beers during an ice storm at the MOOC Research Initiative Conference in Arlington Texas. To be honest, I didn't find the first few weeks that inspiring, but I still had a strong desire to participate at least peripherally. Something interesting was happening and I wanted to be a part of it.

In the past, I have engaged in MOOCs primarily through my blog, and occasionally through Twitter. So, when the #rhizo14 Facebook group started, I figured I'd give that a try. It is interesting how other MOOC platforms attempt to imitate the Facebook type discussions, but have never successfully drawn my interest, and yet the #rhizo14 discussions did. #rhizo14 also had P2PU discussions, but I found the interface too frustrating. I could not overcome the inertia needed to participate in a new platform, whereas Facebook was already part of my daily workflow.

A turning point for me was when a member of the #rhizo14 community sent me a Facebook friend request. The request was sent with a personal letter and gave me permission to decide whether or not I wanted to cross the barrier between professional and personal. It was done in such a way as to avoid the

awkwardness of someone you have never met in person sending you a Facebook friend request. It was also a welcome transition, or evolution of the community. It was a sign that #rhizo14 was more than a loose connection of colleagues, but rather a community where friendships could be made.

The discussions quickly went well beyond the “course” prompts. I became more involved when #rhizo14 Facebook group became a place where we could discuss the various ethical and moral issues surrounding open research. This became a particularly hot topic after the #et4online conference, which I attended. The #rhizo14 “course” was mentioned during several keynotes; however, the people mentioning it were not active “insiders” in the community. It highlighted questions around “permission” in an “open” community. There were no right or wrong answers, and the discussions often did not come to a single conclusion or consensus. We discussed things like “Who owns a Facebook thread? Who do you need permission from before using open content, like our discussions or autoethnography?” These were big questions, and we had the freedom to explore them in a non-judgmental way. The norms of the community have allowed for challenging of ideas without personal judgments.

The experience with #rhizo14 gave me the confidence to reach out and start another community (propagating rhizomatically). When an academic blogger that I respect started a series of blog posts on learning theories, I wanted a place to discuss the different posts. I reached out to him on Twitter, and based upon our discussions I created a new Facebook group as a home for discussions. A few of the #rhizo14 regulars joined the new group, and then, within a few days over 100 people who heard about the group through various paths signed up to share insights into the various learning theories. The #rhizo14 experience demonstrated for me how a Facebook group can be used to help foster a learning community. I have used what I have learned in #rhizo14 to propagate my experience with online community learning into a new rhizomatic community with a different theme, but with the same openness to take the conversations in any direction that the participants wish. This new form of organic learning community is something that arose out of my #rhizo14 experience.

COMMUNITY AS CURRICULUM: DISCUSSION

The narratives provided above serve to illustrate our participant experiences in #rhizo14 and show how we feel that the community became more than the curriculum. What follows discusses these ideas in more detail.

...The network ties created between people during a MOOC—because they are based on intrinsic interests and on long-term personal platforms rather than confined solely to course topics or to a course content management system—have the potential to continue as sustainable and relevant personal and professional connections beyond the boundaries of the course itself. (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens, & Cormier, 2010, p. 35)

In his narrative, Dave Cormier writes that his aims for the course were to create a sense of “eventedness” (shared experience) and to raise questions about belonging and ownership in this age of abundance. What we have written in our narratives suggest the course fulfilled Cormier’s aims. In analysing all of the narratives, we have identified some common themes.

FACEBOOK’S ROLE IN COMMUNITY BUILDING

All narratives above show how contributors value the community that continued beyond the “official” course in #rhizo14. Unexpectedly, at least for us, Facebook played a key role in fostering this community. Facebook was part of many participants’ daily practice: It was easy to keep up with updates, and promoted a blurring between social and professional spaces. Because Facebook was not the “official” learning environment for the course, it belonged to the community rather than the facilitator, and was limited neither by time nor topics of the course itself.

DIVERSITY OF OPINIONS AND DIVERSITY OF PARTICIPANTS

Several of the narratives also highlight how the diversity of the group promoted members’ engagement and learning. Bali and Sharma (2014) cite #rhizo14 as a counter-example to much of what is wrong with xMOOCs, noting that xMOOCs are largely focused on Western-centric content and culture, often delivered didactically, whereas #rhizo14 was centered on participants bringing and sharing their own knowledge and context. As mentioned in the narratives above, some of the most active participants were from geographically dispersed countries, including Egypt (one of the authors of this article), Brazil, Guyana, and the Philippines. This diversity, however, also required some compromises from those from the West. For example, the course facilitator changed the regular hangout times to accommodate Europe/Africa time zones. Accommodating diversity also came into play during a tricky discussion early in the course regarding whether or not it was necessary for participants to read the original text of Deleuze & Guattari. (Although this was not required reading, the concept of the rhizome used in rhizomatic learning comes from their writings.) Some participants asserted that requiring this reading would exclude people who were less academic, non-native speakers, or simply not comfortable reading this difficult text. This heated discussion (which for the most part occurred one morning in the Euro-Africa time zone while the course facilitator was asleep) (Bali, 2015) resulted in some individuals from both sides of the debate leaving the course, while some others who remained became closer through this experience. It is nearly impossible for a facilitator of a distributed online course the size of #rhizo14 to accommodate everyone; in fact, accommodating all learners even within small courses in traditional settings is complicated (Bali, 2015).

The diversity of participants also allowed sub-communities to form. There were participants inclined towards collaborative creation of poetry and art, while others inclined towards conducting research about the course; these formed two separate research groups conducting research in different ways.

FLEXIBILITY OF PARTICIPATION BECAUSE OF MINIMAL REQUIRED OUTPUTS

Because the “required” course content was minimal (no long videos, no required readings), participants were able to dip in and out of the course as they wanted, and this allowed for a flexibility of participation that many other courses do not accommodate. Some people felt this resulted in a lack of direction: There was no way to know if one was learning or achieving anything in particular, since goals were set by each individual for him- or herself. However, as experienced by the authors, this course “design” encouraged autonomy and allowed room for participants to set their own goals and paths and create their own “curriculum.” No set reading meant people had more time to engage with each other’s blogs; only one question per week meant there was time for people to set their own agendas and start discussing different things or taking the week’s topic in different directions. Not everything necessarily built on prior learning or course content. Indeed, two of the participant narratives make it clear that they did not engage with #rhizo14 at the outset, but were able to join the party late without feeling a need to catch up, as late enrollment in traditional courses often requires. Because participants were able to take charge of their learning from early on, the official end of the MOOC had no significance. Participants simply continued to discuss topics that interested them; first, formally by posting new topics to P2PU after discussion on Facebook or Twitter (often the topic would have come up on someone’s blog and generated enough discussion to warrant being singled out), and then eventually without any particular formality.

Importantly, #rhizo14 is not a “unique” instance of this phenomenon of a MOOC that just wouldn’t die. #Etmoooc, offered by Alec Couros in 2013, is another connectivist experience that created a community that continues to engage to the present day (Bali, Crawford, Jessen, Signorelli, & Zamora (2015) contains collaborative autoethnography of multiple such MOOCs including rhizo14 and etmoooc).

PARTIALITY OF THESE NARRATIVES

One risk of a community-centered course such as this one is the possibility of participants not connecting in ways conducive to their own or others’ learning, or to participation in a sustained community. The narratives shared here present the views of participants for whom #rhizo14 “worked.” However, we note that elements of what made this community a success for us did not work from others’ perspectives (see Mackness & Bell, 2015). Not all #rhizo14 participants were Facebook users or wanted to use Facebook for learning purposes; some chose not

to join the group and later reported feeling excluded from conversations. Some #rhizo14 participants expressed discomfort with the lack of formal structure, the laid-back facilitation, and the ways in which Facebook sociality minimized dissenting discourse in attempts to maintain social harmony. Some participants also expressed discomfort with outward displays of affection online, a behavior others considered to be authentic and helpful to community-building. A full exploration of experiences among those who did not value the #rhizo14 course as we did goes beyond the scope of this piece. Nevertheless, we feel strongly that these participants are important, we believe that their experiences are as valid as our own, and we conclude there is value in appreciating why some individuals did not feel included in the #rhizo14 course community. As Cormier has said (in an interview published by Bali & Honeychurch, 2014), exclusion is inevitable in any community because every instance of “we” automatically means “not them.” We would add that any social research account can only be partial. We are making our partiality here explicit; the stories we share here are not representative of an entire community, but of a subset of that community.

For participants who continue to engage with the Facebook group and Twitter, #rhizo14 has evolved from a community focused on a curriculum to one with community as its end, not its means to any particular further goal. This parallels Sidorkin’s (1999) statement that dialogue is the goal of education, not a means to another end. The goal of #rhizo14, therefore, for many of the participants who continue to engage, is the “connecting.” We have now just finished the official six weeks of #rhizo15, and published a collaborative paper by #rhizo14 participants (Hamon et al, 2015). We still stay in touch and have many open social (e.g. Bali & Hogue, 2015) and professional projects together. Success, in this case, is “never finishing” (Cormier quoting Vanessa Genarelli in a Google Hangout).

CONCLUSION

While most xMOOCs to date have focused on mass-scaling educational content delivery, innovation in open online courses can take other forms: #rhizo14 effectively decentered content almost entirely, even more so than most cMOOCs. Collectively, the authors of this work have participated in many cMOOCs. We differentiate #rhizo14 from other cMOOCs in which we have participated based on our assertion that, in #rhizo14, the course community became its curriculum. This focus on community as curriculum in turn enabled that community to exceed the boundaries—and the timelines—of the course itself. The event of the course brought professionals and interested parties into contact with one another, but the emphasis on contribution rather than content mastery opened up room for divergent positions, widely diverse participation, and the eventual decision to carry on together after the official close of the course. With the advent of new

communications technologies and their integration into many people's daily lives, a new form of "eventedness" becomes possible: courses act as gathering points around which learning communities of interested professionals can congregate and grow. Embedded professional learning opportunities that foster discussion can become latent events that learners can tap into at any time, putting learners rather than content at the center and allowing the learning process to become an extension of daily practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all contributors to #rhizo14, particularly our many colleagues who have made the Facebook group such a vibrant and engaging site of learning and discussion these past months.

OPEN DATA

Data for this article does not come from any formal study, but via participation in an open Facebook group that is still active at time of submission. Members of the community active in the Facebook group have been asked and have given their collective permission to have the group linked to as part of the article; any interested readers with an active Facebook account may click the link above to peruse the body of discussion on which the authors report here.

ETHICS

Data for this article is narrative rather than empirical: Each author has simply shared his/her own experiential perspectives. Our research did not require ethical approval from an institution.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors of this paper declare there are no conflicts of interest regarding Facebook or any other commercial products and the content of this article.

REFERENCES

- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. New York, NY and London, UK: Monthly Review Press.
- Bali, M. (2014). MOOC pedagogy: gleanings of good practice from existing MOOCs. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 10(1), 43-56. Retrieved from: <http://jolt.merlot.org/>
- Bali, M. (2015, April 20). Pedagogy of Care-Gone Massive. *Hybrid Pedagogy*. Retrieved from: <http://www.hybridpedagogy.com/journal/pedagogy-of-care-gone-massive/>

- Bali, M., Crawford, C., Jessen, R. L., Signorelli, P., and Zamora, M. (2015). What Makes a cMOOC Community Endure? Multiple Participant Perspectives from Diverse cMOOCs. *Educational Media International*, 52(2), 110-115. doi:10.1080/09523987.2015.1053290
- Bali, M., & Hogue, R. (2015, May 8). Virtual, hybrid, or present? The #et4buddy Conference experiment. *Hybrid Pedagogy*. Retrieved from: <http://www.hybridpedagogy.com/columns/featured/virtual-hybrid-or-present/>
- Bali, M. & Sharma, S. (2014, April 11). Bonds of difference: Participation as inclusion. *Hybrid Pedagogy*. Retrieved from: <http://www.digitalpedagogylab.com/hybridped/bonds-difference-participation-inclusion/>
- Carr, N. (2008, July 1). Is Google making us stupid? What the Internet is doing to our brains. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/>
- Clark, D. (2012, January 18). 7 reasons why Facebook is front runner in social media learning [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <http://donaldclarkplanb.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/7-reasons-why-facebook-is-front-runner.html>
- Cormier, D. (2014a, January 7). What problem does rhizomatic learning solve for me? [Blog post] Retrieved from: <http://davecormier.com/edblog/2014/01/07/what-problem-does-rhizomatic-learning-solve-for-me/>
- Cormier, D. (2014b, April 1). Explaining Rhizo14 to Oscar [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <http://davecormier.com/edblog/2014/04/01/explaining-rhizo14-to-oscar/>
- Cormier, D. (2014c, May 25). Community learning: The zombie resurrection? [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <http://davecormier.com/edblog/2014/05/25/community-learning-the-zombie-resurrection/>
- Cormier, D. (2013, December 27). Rhizomatic Learning—An open course #rhizo14 [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <http://davecormier.com/edblog/2013/12/27/rhizomatic-learning-an-open-course-rhizo14/>
- Cormier, D. (2009). MUVE eventedness: An experience like any other. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. 40(3), 543-546.
- Cormier, D. (2008, June 3). Rhizomatic Education: Community as Curriculum [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <http://davecormier.com/edblog/2008/06/03/rhizomatic-education-community-as-curriculum/>

- Cuban, L. (1986). *Teachers and machines: The classroom use of technology since 1920*. New York, NY: Teachers' College Press.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fullan, M. (2012). *Stratosphere: Integrating technology, pedagogy, and change knowledge*. Toronto, ON: Pearson Canada.
- Hamon, K., Hogue, R., Honeychurch, S., Johnson, S., Koutropoulos, A., Ensor, S., Sinfield, S., & Bali, M. (2015, June). Writing the Unreadable Untext: a Collaborative Autoethnography of #rhizo14. *Hybrid Pedagogy*. Retrieved from <http://www.digitalpedagogylab.com/hybridped/writing-the-unreadable-untext/>
- Junco, R. (2011). The relationship between frequency of Facebook use, participation in Facebook activities and student engagement. *Computers and Education*, 58(1), 162-171.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131511001825>
- Ljepava, N., Orr, R., Locke, S. & Ross, C. (2013). Personality and social characteristics of Facebook non-users and frequent users. *Computers and Human Behaviour*, 29(4), 1602-1607.
- Mackness, J. & Bell, F. (2015). Rhizo14: A Rhizomatic Learning cMOOC in Sunlight and in Shade. *Open Praxis*, 7(4), 25-38.
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.7.1.173>.
- McAuley, A., Stewart, B., Siemens, G. & Cormier, D. (2010). In the Open: The MOOC model for digital practice. SSHRC Report on Knowledge Synthesis for the Digital Economy grant.
- Pappano, L. (2012, November 2). The year of the MOOC. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from:
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/education/edlife/massive-open-online-courses-are-multiplying-at-a-rapid-pace.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.
- Sidorkin, A. M. (1999). *Beyond discourse: Education, the self, and dialogue*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Siemens, G. (2012, September 18). The Internet is happening to education [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <http://www.xedbook.com/?p=54>.
- Stewart, B. (2013). Massiveness + openness=New literacies of participation? *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 9(2), 228-238. Retrieved from: http://jolt.merlot.org/vol9no2/stewart_bonnie_0613.htm
- Tu, C. H., & McIssac, M. (2002). The relationship of social presence and interaction in online classes. *The American*

AUTHOR BIOS

ⁱ **Sarah Honeychurch** is a Learning Technology Specialist and Graduate Teaching Assistant (Philosophy) at the University of Glasgow who specialises in Jigsaw Classroom teaching and other co-operative learning techniques. Sarah is also studying for a PhD at the University of Glasgow in the effectiveness of peer interaction and is looking at online experience. She is an editor of *Hybrid Pedagogy*, an open-access, peer-reviewed journal.

Twitter: @NomadWarMachine Blog: www.NomadWarMachine.co.uk Email: Sarah.Honeychurch@Glasgow.ac.uk

ⁱⁱ **Bonnie Stewart** is an educator and social media researcher fascinated by who we are when we are online. Coordinator of Adult Teaching programs at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada, her work explores professional learning, the intersections of knowledge, technology, and identity, and the implications of networks for contemporary institutions. Bonnie writes and speaks about networked scholarship, social media literacies, digital identities, and massive open online courses (MOOCs), and blogs ideas at <http://theory.cribchronicles.com>. She does her best thinking out loud on Twitter as @bonstewart. Email: bstewart@upei.ca Web: <http://bonstewart.com/>

ⁱⁱⁱ **Maha Bali** is Associate Professor of Practice at the Center for Learning and Teaching at the American University in Cairo. She holds a PhD in Education from the University of Sheffield, UK. She is an editor at the journal, *Hybrid Pedagogy*, and serves as an editorial board member of two journals: *Journal of Pedagogic Development and Learning, Media and Technology*. She is a Prof Hacker blogger, and co-founder of virtuallyconnecting.org and edcontexts.org. Email: bali@aucegypt.edu and Twitter: @bali_maha

^{iv} **Rebecca J. Hogue** is pursuing a PhD in Education at the University of Ottawa. She is an Associate Lecturer in the Instructional Design M.Ed. Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her professional background is in instructional design and software quality assurance. She holds a Master of Arts Degree in Distributed Learning, and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Science. Rebecca is a prolific blogger, currently sharing her academic experiences (<http://rjh.goingeast.ca>) and her lived experience through breast cancer treatment (<http://bcbecky.com>). In addition, she and her husband have a travel blog describing their 16-month journey around the world without airplanes (<http://goingeast.ca>). Rebecca's PhD research involves investigating the impact illness blogs have on patient engagement (<http://livingpathography.org>). Rebecca currently resides in Sunnyvale, California.

^v **Dave Cormier** is an educational activist, researcher and online community advocate. He has published on open education, Rhizomatic Learning, MOOCs (Massive/Open Online Courses), and the impact of technology on the future of high education. He coined the term MOOC in 2008 and has facilitated, consulted and participated in dozens of large open courses.