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Investigating the social configuration of a community to understand how networked learning activities take place: The OERu case study

Bieke Schreurs, Antoine Van den Beemt, Fleur Prinsen, Maarten De Laat

Open Universiteit Nederland, bieke.schreurs@ou.nl; antoine.vandenbeemt@ou.nl, maarten.delaat@ou.nl

Gabi Witthaus, Gráinne Conole

University of Leicester, grw8@leicester.ac.uk; gcc7@leicester.ac.uk

Abstract

Examining how OER (Open Educational Resources) communities come to live, function or learn can support in empowering educators in the use of open educational resources. In this paper we investigate how an OER community functions through its networked learning activities. Networked learning activities enable the development of a space (a social configuration) for shared activity, in which learning by participants is situated. Following existing research on the social configuration of learning communities, we operationalize this space into four superordinate dimensions: (1) domain and value creation, (2) practice (3) collective identity and (4) organisation. We argue that these dimensions add to an understanding of the functionality of learning communities, in this case OER communities.

An in-depth case study was conducted of the OER university (OERu) (www.wikieducator.org/oeru). The OERu is a virtual collaboration of institutions committed to creating flexible pathways for OER learners to gain formal academic credit (WikiEducator, 2013). A mixed-methods approach was used combining data from social network analysis, content analysis, and contextual analysis. Both volunteers and academic contributors from the 26 partner institutions were involved in the study.

The results show how networked learning activities are associated with the social configuration (domain - identity - practice - organisation) of the community and that, through the investigation of this configuration, valuable insights can be gained into why networked learning activities are occurring. We see for example that shared domain could provide a solid ground for networked learning activities within a community and that different identities within the community can result in different networked learning activities. By analysing the organisation of the community, different social configurations were unravelled with different roles, goals and learning platforms. These insights may support the OERu community and other OER communities to develop their networked learning activities further in a sustainable way.

Keywords

Networked learning, value creation, social network analysis, social structures, communities of practice, networks, OERu, Open Educational Resources university

Introduction: Networked learning explored through investigating the social configuration of a community

The demands placed upon teachers to equip learners for the 21st century are increasingly complex. Teachers are required to constantly acquire new knowledge and skills in order to cope with the growing pedagogical insights and rapid technological changes in society. One of the innovations for which practitioners need a wide range of technical, pedagogical and organisational skills is the use of open educational resources (OER) within teaching practice. The success and sustainability of OER depends on a prospering and fit OER movement, where there is full and open collaboration between institutions and amongst individual practitioners using OER (Lane, 2008). For OER to function properly empowering users is of particular importance but at present there exists little experience in how these groups of people come to live, function or learn (Fetter, Berlanga & Sloep, 2012).

In this paper we investigate how practitioners involved in an OER community learn to carry out a range of functions around OER (such as creation, adaptation and reuse of OER and accreditation of OER-based learning) through networked learning activities. Networked learning is here considered in the context of professional development in relation to OER. We will look at how people rely on their contacts for assistance and development within a particular OER community that interacts mostly, but not entirely, via a virtual environment. In our investigation of how practitioners build learning networks through mostly online interactions with others to support their professional development, we take a social constructivist approach to professional development. This approach sees learning as a process of value creation that is a result of participation in social networks (Wenger, Trayner, & De Laat, 2011), also known as networked learning activities. Networked learning activities are commonly defined as learning that emphasizes the use of ICT to promote collaborative or cooperative connections between learners, their tutors/instructors, and learning resources (Goodyear, Banks, Hodgson & McConnell, 2004). For the purposes of this case study, networked learning can be thought of as learning that occurs between peers who are using ICT to collaborate professionally to achieve a joint goal. Networked learning is a process where both individual and collective learning goals and agendas are carefully and constantly negotiated around a topic or domain that is of interest to each participant. To support their networked learning, the learners develop a space for a shared activity in which their learning is situated. In this space they connect ideas, share problems and insights in a constructive way, and connect with concepts with which they are already familiar, using new knowledge that is collaboratively constructed through their dialogues and social interactions (Wenger, Trayner & De Laat, 2011). These networked learning activities can take place within different groups of practitioners, in different social configurations. Groups of practitioners can crystallise in many formal or informal spaces, such as loose networks, formal teams, project teams or communities of practice (Dron & Anderson, 2008). We refer to these spaces as social configurations. We argue that these social configurations can influence networked learning activities within a group.

The social configuration of a group can be operationalized into four superordinate dimensions, namely: (1) domain and value creation, (2) practice (3) collective identity and (4) organisation (Vrieling, Van den Beemt, & De Laat, in press). Each of the four dimensions is constructed from several indicators. These indicators are measured as the extent to which the group shows specific attitudes and behaviour. *Domain and value creation* refer to the shared domain that inspires the members to share, broaden or deepen their knowledge and skills within the community, and the value this creates for the members' practice. *Practice* refers to the extent to which the group exhibits social activities and to which the group knowledge is integrated in day-to-day activities. *Collective identity* measures the mutual engagement that binds the members together in a social entity, shown for instance by a shared identity, strong ties and the perception of group members as knowledge workers. *Organisation* finally refers to the extent to which the group members share interactional norms, the extent to which the group is self-organized based on hierarchical or equal relationships and the extent to which the group has a focus on local or global activities.

In this paper we investigate how the social configuration of a group of practitioners can influence the group's knowledge creation and sharing during networked learning activities. We empirically support our work by representing the results of a case study of the community of the OER university (OERu). OERu is a virtual collaboration of institutions committed to creating flexible pathways for OER learners to gain formal academic credit (WikiEducator, 2013). The OERu case study is part of a broader study in which we investigate 7 communities to get more insights into existing OER communities and projects around the globe. The broader study is conducted within the frame of the POERUP project, funded by the lifelong learning program of the

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European Commission (POERUP, 2013). The POERUP project aims to enable the development of policies to stimulate the uptake of open educational resources.

Methodology

The OERu Case study

The OERu is an initiative of the Open Educational Resource Foundation, based in New Zealand, with the aim of contributing to the global push of the OER agenda. The OERu is the umbrella of a consortium of 26 public post-secondary institutions (EFQUEL, 2013). Alongside the consortium, OERu is enhanced by a system of volunteers (Mackintosh, McGreal, & Taylor, 2011). In this study we approached both volunteers and academic contributors from the partner institutions.

The community consists mainly of academics (producers of OER and related resources) and senior managers (strategy decision-makers) at tertiary education institutions. The website at the time of writing lists 15 'founding anchor partners' and 11 'anchor partners', which together make up the consortium's 26 partner institutions. 36 individuals have added their names to the WikiEducator site as 'volunteers', although the actual number of volunteers is much higher, in the sense that the public Google group (called 'OER university') has 255 members, and many of these individuals contribute to the development of the OERu by initiating or responding to issues for discussion via the email list or responding to occasional surveys. The volunteers referred to in this paper are that wider group of 255.

At all stages in the research process, the OERu network was informed of developments, via the WikiEducator site (the OERu network's communication hub) and the email lists for both the public Google Group and the partner institutions. The data gathering process generated a series of interview transcripts, which were presented on a blog, with the permission of interviewees. The case study contact person was involved at key stages during the project, including in helping to formulate the interview and survey questions, making the content relevant for the OERu participants.

A multi-method approach

To answer our main research question we made use of a mixed-methods approach to triangulate several data sources (De Laat, 2006). The aim of the multi-method approach is to paint a more complete picture of the networked learning processes that practitioners in groups are engaged in. We have applied a broad range of theoretical perspectives to operationalize how people learn within communities - such as communities of practice, community indicators, value creation within networked learning, social network theory and informal learning - and to frame some of the key challenges. The multi-method research framework combines data collection methods based on social network analysis (SNA) to find out 'who is talking to whom', content analysis (CA) to find out 'what they are talking about', and contextual analysis (CxA) focusing on the experiences and settings of the participants to find out 'why they are talking as they do' (De Laat, Lally, Lipponen & Simons, 2006; Schreurs & De Laat, In press).

Contextual Analysis: Framework for analysing the social configuration of groups involved in networked learning activities.

To get insights into the contextual factors we conducted three in-depth structured interviews. We interviewed a volunteer, an academic contributor as partner from an institution and the OERu community coordinator. The interview scheme was guided by a framework for analysing the social configuration of practitioner groups in relation to the group's networked learning activities (Vrieling, Van den Beemt, & De Laat, in press). The framework was based on the above-mentioned four superordinate dimensions: (1) domain and value creation, (2) practice (3) collective identity and (4) organisation, with their corresponding indicators. For the OERu community context we adapted the framework by combining it with the community indicators of Galley, Conole and Alevizou (2012). The resulting framework is used to investigate and understand networked learning activities of the practitioners who participate within the OERu community. To validate the results of the framework we conducted a desktop research to gather data from previous research studies conducted on the OERu case study. The desktop research used the WikiEducator page where all research data are gathered (http://wikieducator.org/OER_university/Resources).

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Content Analysis: Analysing what the practitioners are learning about

To analyse the content of the networked learning activities we use the data gathered within three in-depth interviews, combined with data gathered with the online questionnaire, filled in by 28 participants. The three interviews were held with a community manager, an institutional member and a volunteer. We asked about the specific learning activities with a social component undertaken within the OERu and the content of the learning activities. To identify the types of networked learning activities taking place, we used a list of 34 types of learning activities which could take place within a group of practitioners, both online and offline.

Social Network Analysis: Who talks to whom

Within SNA (Social Network Analysis) social networks are perceived as theoretical constructs useful in the study of relationships between individuals. SNA operationalizes a social structure in 1) nodes - the individual actors within a network and 2) ties - the relationships between the actors. Two main forms of SNA can be distinguished: ego network analysis and whole network analysis. Ego network analysis investigates social networks by describing the ties within the network starting from one individual, called an 'ego'. Other individuals in the network are referred to as 'alters' (Ünlüsoy, De Haan, & Leander, 2010). Whole network analysis focuses on the pattern of relationships between actors within a defined, or bounded, group, focusing on the overall population. To speak of whole network analysis, you need data of at least 89% of the total population (Wasserman & Faust, 1996). Because of the diversity of the members and the roles within the OERu community we used ego network analysis to investigate the OERu community members' individual learning ties formed around the use of open educational resources.

The mapping of these ties was done in three steps, with the aim being to gather quantitative data about the structuring of networked learning activities within the OERu community. In the first step, a name generator question was formulated to generate a list of a maximum of ten people with whom the respondents had had valuable conversations around the use of open educational resources in the past three months. We asked for valuable conversations because we believe that networked learning is a form of value creation that happens within an interaction, both formal and informal. In the second step we asked 'name interpreter questions' to get information about the alters' characteristics (e.g. gender) and about characteristics of the relationship (e.g. 'Do you meet mostly online or offline?'; 'Are you colleagues or friends?') In the third step we asked respondents to indicate in a matrix which of these persons knew each other, as far as the respondent was aware. This resulted in ego networks from all 28 participants (see Figure 1 for an example). In this regard, we follow Ünlüsoy, De Haan, & Leander (2010), who state that the ego network methodology is well suited to the study of networked learning activities, as it focuses on the individual as a connected person. The mapping of an individual's network provides insights regarding the resources a person has access to, and the dynamics within this social world - insights that are highly relevant for an approach to learning in which connectivity is key. The survey was sent out to the public mailing list of the OERu Community on Google Groups and also the internal mailing list for employees at OERu partner institutions, resulting in 28 responses, representing both volunteers (42.9%) and individuals acting in their capacity as employees of the partner institutions (42.9%), the remaining 14,2% are under the "other" category.

Data Analysis

The interviews were analysed by means of a coding scheme developed to generate insights within the four superordinate dimensions. Personal Network Analysis was used to analyse the specific network data gathered via the online survey. The structure of the network can be measured by the degree (total number of relationships indicated by the respondents) and the density of the ego network. The density of the network indicated how many of the alters of a person's ego network knew each other. A network in which everybody knows everybody is very dense (100%). We also investigate the heterogeneity in the personal networks; this is how diverse the relationships are of an ego, based on the characteristics of alters and the relationships with alters. We also measured the composition of the network, based on the same characteristics. We can for example measure if an ego's network consists mainly of internal colleagues or of relationships where the conversations happen mostly online. We analysed the personal network data using E-NET, a free software package for analysing personal network data (Borgatti, 2006). We used SPSS Package to analyse general descriptive measures and correlations.

Results

Networked learning activities take place within a group of people, depending on the social configuration of the network (Vrieling, Van den Beemt, & De Laat, in press). We describe the social configuration of the OERu

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community by triangulating the results from the interviews, the survey and three other research reports conducted on the OERu community. Subsequently we describe the networked learning activities. This approach shows us how networked learning activities within an international community, supported by means of a wiki, active mailing lists and face-to-face contact, result from the social construction (domain - identity - practice - organisation) of the community.

Domain

What inspires all community members to participate in OERu is the shared philanthropic values concerning education in general. The interview respondents stated that the biggest value the community creates for them is sharing mutual values with peers. These values are mirrored in a shared goal: widening participation in education through sharing OER. These findings confirm earlier research that describes the shared goal of OERu partner institutions as being to provide free learning opportunities for students anywhere in the world, with flexible pathways to formal assessment and accreditation using OER (Conrad & McGreal, 2012). On a society level, the interviewees want to share the values around opening up of education for all with the wider society in a sustainable way.

According to research on social network theory (Baker -Doyle & Yoon, 2010; Hansen, 1999; Krackhardt, 1999; Tortoriello & Krackhardt, 2010), sharing norms and values is usually accomplished within a closed and dense network. The individual networks of the survey respondents show that the members of the community have indeed developed relatively dense ego networks.

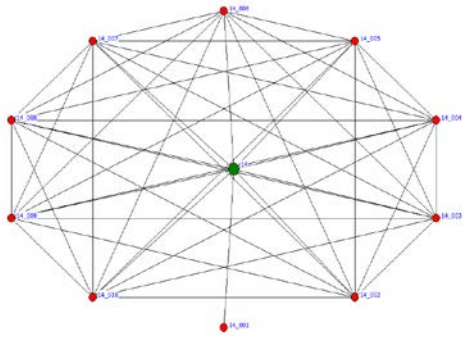


Figure 1: Ego network in which ego (node in the centre) has 10 alters and A high density (40%)

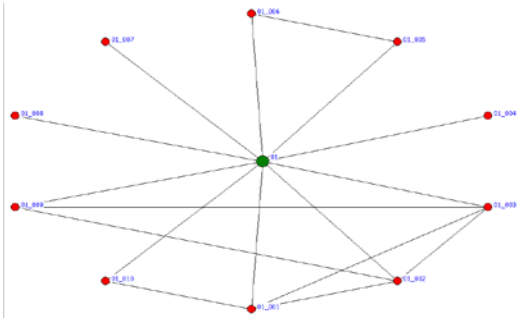


Figure 2: Ego network in which ego has 10 alters and very low (7.8%) density

Dense ego networks are networks in which alters of ego also know each other. The density of the ego networks in the OERu community ranges from 18% to 50% with a mean of 31%. Density is a relative term, as it depends on the size and the composition of the network. (Please see Figures 1 and 2 for an example of ego networks with high and extremely low density). Given the fact that the OERu is an international community with a wide global spread (partners in every continent), we can state that the individual networks are relatively dense. Striking is also that one outlier only has an ego network with a degree of 7%. This person indicated in the survey that he is not actively involved within the OERu community, as his institution was not ready to participate. This means that although he considers himself nominally a member of the OERu community, he is actually rather disconnected from this community. At the same time this person's personal network around the use of OER is also a very loose network. This loose network is represented in figure 2. You can see that almost nobody is connected with each other in this network. Although this is an individual case, this finding could indicate that people who are actively involved in the OERu community tend to have a denser network around the use of OERu than people who are not part of a community like OERu, or who are only on the periphery of such communities. Therefore we would like to investigate further if this could indicate that the OERu community does actively connect people and help both volunteers and institutional members to make their personal networks around OER more connected.

Identity

To gain a shared framework of values it is important to have a shared identity within the community (Wenger, 1998). The interview results show that the participants see the OERu community as open, diverse and

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established. The shared identity refers to the shared philanthropic values and shared purpose, that of widening access to education using OER. This confirms the results of the study by Bird and Witthaus (2012). According to the volunteer who was interviewed, all community members have the feeling that they belong to the OERu community and that they have a sense of ownership. From the interviews with the community manager and the institutional member, it is apparent that both have a sort of double identity, reflecting the organisation of the community. The institutional members and the coordinator are the core group within the community and the volunteers are participating in the wider community. It could be described as an inner and outer circle within the community. However, although the community is organised like this, it is compelling to see that both the outer and inner circle share the same values and the volunteers can experience a sense of ownership. As noted by the volunteer in the interview:

> "… But for OERu, there are people who are there, it's their initiative, they want to provide education, to open up education. The people who are receiving those emails, all of them are involved in the initiative. It's not like Coursera for example. We saw MOOCs coming and we don't know where they came from! [Laughing] And what we did was we joined, just to learn how they work, but we were not the ones starting them. But the OERu, people who are in that community were involved since it was initiated in the beginning." (Interview with volunteer)

The fact that the volunteer contrasts the OERu community with MOOCs also speaks to him perceiving the OERu as having its own, unique identity.

There is one institutional member who indicated in the survey that s/he had found it difficult to connect to the core group and get more involved. This person also indicates a very low knowledge of how to use open learning materials and finds the main communication platform, WikiEducator, complicated. This could explain her/his feeling in terms of not being able to connect and could emphasise the role of the platform (and skills necessary to operate on it) as a way to connect to the community members.

Organisation

Next, we explain the way the OERu is organised to establish their community activities. In the interviews, both the volunteer and the institutional member emphasize the important role of the OERu community moderator. He is described as the network hub. They both see good leadership as a critical success factor for the community to be sustainable. The institutional member also indicated that the OERu community puts a lot of energy into embedding the ideas into the institutional context. This approach is often discussed within the OERu smaller community of institutional members, where they give each other advice on how to embed the OERu community values into their institutions. Institutional members of the OERu work with small teams of colleagues at their own institutions to achieve the practical goals of the OERu community. The coordinator, together with the institutional members, is the inner core of the community. The inner core of the community is supported by an institutional team who are informed by the institutional liaison person. Around this interaction there is an outer circle community of volunteers and interested individuals, who share the same values and ideas and are part of the OERu community to learn from the practical experiences of the inner core. The community coordinator explains it as follows:

> 'I think the onion metaphor is to some extent a useful metaphor. By the same token, it's more amoebic. [Laughs] It's very open and very dynamic. It goes with the heart. The community is moving forward, but I think what enables us to function in this way, which is possibly more important than trying to analyse who the community is, is the fact of radical transparency. Everything that we do is radically transparent and radically open, and that helps inform who decides and who contributes. It's interesting to watch the dynamic.'

The core OERu community communicates mainly through an internal mailing list, institutional teams communicate mainly face-to-face on-site at their institutions (and by personal email) and the wiki, and the outer circle communicates via a public, Google Groups mailing list and the wiki.

The type of ties we saw as a result of the ego network survey also confirms this. If we look at the total number of valuable conversations held completely offline (23 versus 10 for the outer) and completely online (9 versus 15), we see that members of the OERu partner institutions have more valuable conversations offline than

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volunteers have, while the online environment is important in supporting the valuable, wider participation by volunteers.

Table 2: Comparing volunteers and institution members for number of online relationships

CAPACITY (rows) versus CONTACT_HOW (cols): number of relations

	Just offline	Just Online	More often online as offline	More often offline then online	About equal times online and offline
Member of institution	23	9	14	26	7
Volunteer	10	15	26	20	6
Other	6	2	8	1	12

Chi-square = 38.846 with 8 degrees of freedom. Significance = 0.000

When it comes to atmosphere, all respondents confirm that the OERu community is very open, professional and collaborative. According to the institutional member and the coordinator in the interviews, the OERu community has members with a variety of skills, from beginners to very advanced. According to the survey results this is true for the institutional members: 41,7% rate their skills in using open learning materials at an intermediate level, while 41,7 % of the volunteers indicate they are at an advanced level. The volunteer in the interview confirms this as he thinks the skills are probably quite good.

Practice

Although the different parties share the same goals and values, they have very different roles within the community. The co-creation of materials takes place mostly within the inner core of the community - in other words, amongst the OERu's 26 partner institutions that are co-creating a system in which learners will, in future, be able to achieve credits through learning with OER. The interviewed member of one of the partner institutions described his role as broker between his own institution, the core OERu community (members of the other partner institutions) and the wider OERu community that communicates via the Google group. The community manager described his role as coordinator of the 26 participating institutions. The volunteer saw his role more as a contributor to the global debate about open educational resources, taking the position of the minorities in the world, e.g. institutions from developing countries that do not have access to the Internet. These differences in roles are also reflected within the ego networks of the survey respondents. Table 1 shows that the institutional members have a balanced network and a more or less equal number of internal colleagues (in the same institution as them) as external colleagues, while the volunteers report having valuable conversations mostly with external colleagues (i.e. colleagues who work in different institutions from themselves). Table 1 also shows that volunteers rely more on friends and personal acquaintances for valuable conversations around OER. This could indicate that the OERu partner institutions have institutionalised OER more and so these members have more opportunities to discuss with colleagues in their own institution, while the volunteers merely rely on the wider community to discuss open education. (It is worth noting that this wider community includes fellow members of the wider OERu community.)

Table 1: Comparing the type of relations between members of an institution and volunteers.

	External Colleague	Internal Colleague	Business Partner	Friend	Personal Acquaintance	Learner	Teacher
Member of institution	26	38	4	0	3	0	0
Volunteer	31	21	0	5	6	0	4
Other	12	4	0	0	7	1	2

Chi-square = 42.822 with 14 degrees of freedom, Significance = 0.000

The content analysis shows that institutional members of the OERu indicate that they discuss institutional barriers, challenges and opportunities in relation to open learning. Institutional members also modify content of open learning materials, and four people indicated that they also worked on the accreditation plans and procedures. These practice-driven activities are mostly indicated by the institutional members and less by the volunteers. The fact that the institutional members modify existing learning materials and discuss the barriers

supports the main practical goal of OERu inner core community, which is to provide assessment and credentialisation services on a fee-for-service basis.

The networked learning activities undertaken explained by the social configuration of the OERu Community.

A shared domain serves as a solid ground for networked learning activities within the wider community

The volunteer said he enjoyed learning in a community through his participation in OERu. He said knowledge and experience are shared in the wiki of the community and via the email discussions. He added that he was learning 'naturally' on the community platforms, by having asynchronous discussions in which his ideas were challenged. He also emailed community members if he needed particular information. He claimed the openness, freedom, flexibility (reflected within the shared identity) and expertise of the members (reflected within the practice) created learning value:

> 'So I did not have to force myself to write something, as for example, in the case of classes where you have to write something because you are required to. So, that kind of freedom to contribute when you have something. And that's what I would call original or kind of natural learning, the learning that comes from me as a learner. But also as people were discussing, they were high professionals... as I was contributing, I was learning sometimes.'

Alongside the informal learning that takes place, the core community members also organize (non-formal) workshops in the shape of open online courses. For example, an online workshop on copyright is regularly organized for the wider community, with participation from the core community. Here the core community experts are more contributors and the wider community members are participants. Additionally, anyone who has created a free login on use the WikiEducator site can use this site to ask questions of experts in the form of an Q&A forum, and they can follow a course on how to use the wiki.

The double identity of the institutional member who was interviewed, as both an academic and a liaison person, makes his position like a bridge: he translates knowledge from the community members to his institutional team, along with the practical implications, and vice-versa.

Within the smaller community of partner institutions, the interviewee says he reads the discussions that come in through the institutional members' mailing list. He added that he reflects on what is being said, contributes, and implements the ideas within his own institution by discussing the ideas with his internal colleagues. Within the institutional team, most learning takes place offline through their shared practice within their own institution. Both the coordinator and the institutional member say that the actual deep learning happens here. Alongside the internal mailing system, they also shared knowledge on new concepts they were developing, for example accrediting prior learning, with the wider community in the wiki, and he indicated they learned a lot from the contributions of the community members.

> 'Certainly the feedback that I - I mean we, not me personally - after we'd put up our contribution was, oh wow, we'd not thought about this and we'd not thought about that.'

The complexity and multi-level feature of the organisation requires more time to develop deeper networked learning activities to the wider community.

Although the volunteer was positive about his learning experience, the coordinator thinks that there is a lot of knowledge sharing within the core community, but that many of the stories from within the partner institutions which could be relevant to others are not shared with the wider community. Also the institutional member thinks the sharing of information and storytelling within the wider community is limited, maybe because of the fact that the community itself is only a few years old, and because many of the members have not yet met face-to-face. According to the coordinator, the members are still learning how to share open learning materials within their own institutions and within their own practice. This assumption is also reflected in the content analysis of the learning experiences reported within the survey. Only two institutional members and two volunteers of the 28 community members indicate that they learn from peers in the community. Also other activities that could initiate learning, such as starting discussions, having informal conversations and providing constructive criticism are only mentioned by a small number of respondents.

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Most networked learning takes place, in practice, where people try to develop open learning materials or try to get answers to concrete questions through discussions and structured conversations. The community still needs to learn to informally share expertise and experiences to optimize the learning experience of all community members. In the words of the institutional community member who was interviewed:

> "I mean sure there's lots of reflections within the network, but most of those reflections tend to be offline. There's a lot of offline reflection between partners sharing their experiences and helping to inform the process. I would certainly like to see a lot more of this reflection taking place in the open forums, for the benefit of all members. But I guess this is one of the biggest challenges we face in the OER movement at the moment, is crossing the chasm from this notion of sharing to learn, you know, this idea that we share OER courses for the benefit of learning, so crossing the chasm from sharing to learn, to learn to share."

Conclusion

By analysing the social configuration of the OERu community as a case study we see that within one community, different social organisations are embedded (institutional teams - core community of practice and a wider community, including volunteers) with different roles, goals and learning platforms. Although the configuration includes different practices and interactional repertoires, networked learning activities take place at all levels within the community. This could be explained by the shared domain and shared identity of the whole OERu community, which is facilitated by (but also allows the maintenance of) dense personal networks of both volunteers and institutional members. Additionally, the fact that the sharing of knowledge is well embedded within the institutional teams and that there is an active project coordinator in the role of a network hub adds to the functionality of this OER network. This analysis indicates that, through the investigation of the social configuration of a community or group of people, valuable insights can be gained into why networked learning activities are taking place. Although members do learn about the practicalities of using open learning materials and accrediting OER-based learning, the actual knowledge dissemination to the wider community still seems rather limited. An open community with a well-established and multi-levelled organisation is a good starting point, but like good wine, maturation and time is needed to share stories and experiences and learn in a networked way.

To get more insights into networked learning activities happening in communities we will broaden this research with six more case studies around the use of OER, including two MOOCs. Herein we want to investigate for example if a different type of organisational structure, results in different networked learning activities. Furthermore we would like to study if a shared identity and a shared domain, which are very central in the OERu community, are also central in other OER communities. Or whether communities with different goals also differ in the type of value they create together and therefore also have different learning results.

A final research question we will try to unravel is to identify whether there are sustainable communities of practice around OER. Here we will ask whether time is indeed a factor in establishing sustainable networked learning activities, or if communities of practice are more characterized by an interplay of short- and long-term memberships, resulting in a transformation from communities of practice into an ever-changing landscape of dynamic networks of practice.

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