Teacher Professional Learning Networks and the 'politics of circulation'

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Seed project final report

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Executive Summary

This is a report from a small 'seed' project funded by the Communities and Cultures Network+. It involved researchers from the University of Brighton School of Education (UoB SoE) investigating perceptions and uses of social media-based professional learning networks in the context of teaching and teacher education.

The project aimed to engage with contrasting perspectives on the potential for digital media to influence practices of professional learning: from the broadly utopian claims about connection in democratic, egalitarian, geographically dispersed communities of practice, to more sceptical and critical perspectives questioning the 'politics of circulation' (Beer 2013) particularly in a context of global education reform (Ball 2012).

The research involved: discussions and interviews with SoE teacher educator colleagues and other active teacher-educator social media users; a survey of UoB SoE alumni; a focus group with SoE graduates in their third year of teaching; attendance at the European Conference on Social Media, hosted by the UoB in July 2014; and the collation and initial data analysis of samples of social media networks within and beyond the SoE.

The overall picture that emerged was one of uneven development and change, and of both opportunities and anxieties in relation to similar affordances of new media.

For instance, the opportunity to build a professional profile and identity and to communicate with others about practice online was also the cause of anxiety about 'context collapse' between professional and personal boundaries or the encroachment of commercial influence. There were notable continuities with 'traditional' approaches to professional learning, such as the influence of colleagues in schools or of ideas encountered during programmes of teacher education. Professional subject teaching associations appeared to be powerful gatekeepers, although they could also be perceived as overly restrictive, 'old school', hierarchical or controlling. Social media played a greater role where relevant professional bodies did not exist or were rejected. Education communities were splintered in a number of ways: for example, our participants used many different platforms, their choices reflecting what was available when they became adopters of social media as much as their intrinsic merits. The networks and individuals that appear to have influence in relation to current government policy featured less in the accounts of our participants, who trusted instead trade unions, colleagues and other sources.

Towards its end, the project identified an emergent social media platform (@staffrm) developed by SoE colleagues, which aims to overcome some of the shortcomings of social-media-based PLNs: we will observe its evolution closely in the coming months as a potential example of good practice. The seed project identified a number of other avenues for further research and collaboration with colleagues, particularly in terms of teacher education provision.

Using tools for analysing social media proved to be (even) more complicated, and less informative, than we originally thought. It was not easy to gain a clear picture of patterns of influence from the exploratory investigations the project could conduct within funding and time constraints, although this in itself was useful to know, and some progress was made on visualising connections in networks.

Aims and Objectives:

The project had the following aims and objectives:
- To interrogate the claims made about the participatory and developmental potential of social-media-based Professional Learning Networks, using the example of teaching professionals as an analytically rich vantage point from which to examine the 'politics of circulation' in new media.

- To engage HEI-based teacher educators, recent graduates, partner schools and other organisations in dialogue about online communities and how these might be shaping teacher educators', schools' and newly qualified teachers' professional cultures, identities and practices
- To understand better how to operate, analyse and organise within digitally shifting professional environments; in particular to support teacher educators in using social media to amplify the voice of academic research and maintain commitments and values, and their capacity critically to engage with the 'politics of circulation' in educational policy and practice.
- To consider the potential to develop this pilot into a larger study covering a wider range and type of professional network (such as youth workers or health professionals as well as teachers).
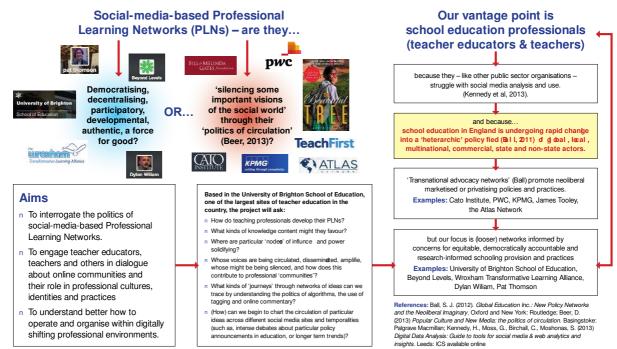
The project involved the following activities:
- Individual interviews (4) and group discussions (2) with UoB SoE colleagues.
- Phone interview with Julie Lilly from @BeyondLevels (launched shortly before our research period, for 'assessment beyond levels' DfE project).
- Online survey using Survey Monkey of SoE alumni about their professional learning networks, collating and analyzing 76 responses.
- Focus group discussion of social media and PLNs with three SoE alumni, all (coincidentally) in their third year of teaching.
- Collecting a number of Twitter handles of SoE staff.
- Working with a UoB PhD student, Nikolay Burlutskiy from the School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics, to undertake some initial 'data scraping' of Twitter accounts.
- Presenting our project as a poster at the European Conference on Social Media in Brighton July 10-11 2014, see below.

Teacher Professional Learning Networks and the 'politics of circulation'

University of Brighton

Dr Nadia Edmond and Dr Sara Bragg, University of Brighton School of Education / Education Research Centre
Funded by the Research Councils UK Communities and Culture Network + May–September 2014

Social-media-based Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) – are they…

Democratising, decentralising, participatory, developmental, authentic, a force for good?

OR…

'silencing some important visions of the social world' through their 'politics of circulation' (Beer, 2013)?

Our vantage point is school education professionals (teacher educators & teachers)

because they – like other public sector organisations – struggle with social media analysis and use. (Kennedy et al, 2013).

and because…
school education in England is undergoing rapid change into a 'heterarchic' policy fied (Ball, 2011) of global, local, multinational, commercial, state and non-state actors.

'Transnational advocacy networks' (Ball) promote neoliberal marketised or privatising policies and practices.
Examples: Cato Institute, PWC, KPMG, James Tooley, the Atlas Network

but our focus is (looser) networks informed by concerns for equitable, democratically accountable and research-informed schooling provision and practices
Examples: University of Brighton School of Education, Beyond Levels, Wroxham Transformative Learning Alliance, Dylan Wiliam, Pat Thomson

Aims
- To interrogate the politics of social-media-based Professional Learning Networks.
- To engage teacher educators, teachers and others in dialogue about online communities and their role in professional cultures, identities and practices
- To understand better how to operate and organise within digitally shifting professional environments.

Based in the University of Brighton School of Education, one of the largest sites of teacher education in the country, the project will ask:
- How do teaching professionals develop their PLNs?
- What kinds of knowledge content might they favour?
- Where are particular 'nodes' of influnce and power solidifying?
- Whose voices are being circulated, disseminated, amplifie, whose might be being silenced, and how does this contribute to professional 'communities'?
- What kinds of 'journeys' through networks of ideas can we trace by understanding the politics of algorithms, the use of tagging and online commentary?
- (How) can we begin to chart the circulation of particular ideas across different social media sites and temporalities (such as, intense debates about particular policy announcements in education, or longer term trends)?

References: Ball, S. J. (2012). *Global Education Inc.: New Policy Networks and the Neoliberal Imaginary*. Oxford and New York: Routledge; Beer, D. (2013) *Popular Culture and New Media: the politics of circulation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Kennedy, H., Moss, G., Birchall, C., Moshonas, S. (2013) *Digital Data Analysis: Guide to tools for social media & web analytics and insights*. Leeds: ICS available online

Key findings

Our research identified significant **continuities** with older or traditional forms of professional learning. For instance, 72% of our survey participants stated that ideas from their teacher education course were important or very important to their professional learning and development (with a statistically significant difference between those over 35 being more likely to state that they were very important compared to those under 35); 99% of respondents stated the same of colleagues in the institution where they currently teach. Survey respondents and interview participants also mentioned trade unions as important sources in finding out about trends and developments in education policy, rather than the sources that are more prominent in accounts of the Global Education Reform Movement (Ball 2012; Lingard et al 2013).

While only 43% of respondents stated that Professional Associations were important or very important to them, more granular analysis of qualitative data suggested that some professional subject teaching associations were powerful gatekeepers (for instance, the Association of Science Education and the Geographical Association; the latter was described by a teacher we interviewed as 'the only one I would follow'). However, these could also be perceived as overly restrictive, 'old school', hierarchical or controlling. Social media played a greater role where relevant professional bodies did not exist (such as in relation to Special Educational Needs) or were rejected.

Amongst our immediate SoE colleagues, we identified some concerns in relation to social media about not wanting to seem self-promotional or too individual-focused ('self-obsessed'). These seemed to us to be familiar forms of academic 'habitus', which contrasted with the more obviously promotional (of self and related others) policy networks more geared to corporate values.

The project explored the transformative potential of digital technologies in teacher professional learning. It enhanced and extended our understanding of the potential impact of mobile and digital technologies in identifying **challenges and opportunities** presented by mobile and digital technologies. The 'politics of circulation' that defines new media (Beer 2013) generates both the positive outcomes and the anxieties and problems participants described.

In terms of opportunities, participants identified key advantages of social media in relation to professional learning as including: being able to keep up with current policy trends; access to inside information, eg from those inside government policy; accessing 'snippets' of information, that could then be pursued in greater depth when time allowed; free resources related to teaching content. 79% of survey respondents stated that websites such as the Guardian, TES, Pinterest etc. were important or very important, compared to 42% who thought that blogs or micro-blogs were. There was a significant difference between primary and secondary sectors, with 84% of primary vs. 65% of secondary respondents stating that websites were important to them. Primary teachers were virtually unanimous in stating that they used social media to find practical ideas for teaching compared to 67% of secondary teachers. Overall 64% of respondents stated that 'social media (or online communities) offer me as a teacher valuable access to resources and expertise I would not otherwise get'; 80% that they 'used social media to find practical ideas e.g. lesson plans for my teaching'. Our survey identified a wider range of online resources than we had been aware of at the start, such as Twinkl (for primary teaching), Tumblr, or the popularity of TED talks amongst teachers.

One SoE graduate had developed a very active social media profile that engaged her in networking within and through the Association of Science Education; others were dismayed to find that their online activities prior to their becoming teachers left them exposed to being tracked down by students. Another focus group participant taught in a special school and argued that social media provided really important resources for her area, which was not well serviced either by Schools of Education or a professional association. It also appeared that social media could be a politicizing context, for instance for finding out about reasons for strike action or about campaigns against free schools and academies

that were ongoing at the time of our research.

The challenges identified in most cases referred to the same features of social media that were seen as providing opportunities. Free resources, for instance, were also seen as containing inaccuracies and as threatening the viability of organisations that relied on membership fees to sustain the quality of their work: 'you see what's being passed off as good work' as an SoE lecturer commented acidly. Immediacy was reinterpreted by one SoE colleague as generating pointless controversy for the sake of it, based on misrepresentations on micro-blogging sites such as Twitter. Both SoE staff and school teachers described additional workload generated by controversies and (mis)communications online, whether by school or university students. There were concerns over commercial infiltration, such as getting followed on twitter by companies hoping to get products endorsed, or by organisations with problematic agendas (such as a US-based group advocating a particular treatment for autism).

SoE colleagues highlighted what they saw as online **ethics** and their breaching by some active participants in online communities – for instance, bloggers who relentlessly criticized other blogs even when these were written by new teachers. Informal codes of practice in relation to the ethics of online behaviour appear to be very much a work in progress, with no agreed norms. The tendency of particular platforms to generate their own codes of usage was felt alienating by some: as one SoE colleague reported, 'I feel totally confused by what most people say on twitter – full of hash tag geek stuff and declamations that I don't quite understand'. Equally, some interviewees saw it as their role to support and amplify the voices of classroom practitioners, communicating directly with and encouraging them to share their practice.

It could also be argued that a picture emerged of **fragmented** and siloed social media usage. Even amongst our small sample, a wide range of social media platforms were being used for professional purposes (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Academia.edu, Google +), with little crossover and exchange between them. Preferences for one or the other might relate to what was available when individuals first adopted social media as much as to the intrinsic merits of the affordances of these different platforms. Individuals who were seen as significant in our research were not necessarily ones who were perceived as having policy influence (eg the Heads' Roundtable). At the same time, features of social media inhibit discussion across political positions. For instance, the 'public' nature of whom you 'follow' on Twitter might be seen as an endorsement, making one cautious about one's choices in these respects.

Using **tools for analysing social media** proved to be (even) more complicated, and less informative, than we originally thought. It was not easy to gain a clear picture of patterns of influence from the exploratory investigations the project could conduct within funding and time constraints. For instance, we asked our data-scraping expert to look at nine Twitter accounts: this resulted in around 26,000 tweets. Our request to calculate whose tweets were retweeted proved difficult to implement. In Twitter API, there is a counter but a limit of 60 requests per 15 minutes, which meant that to find out how many retweets all tweets had would have taken (26.000/60)*15 min = 110 hours! In any case, it would be crude to take retweets as a measure of influence or approval. In addition, we attempted to use Node XL (see Smith et al 2014) but found it had some limitations. For instance, NodeXL permits downloading only 200 of the most recent tweets from a twitter account, compared to Twitter API, which allows downloading of up to 3240 of the most recent tweets.

Nonetheless, we made some progress both in understanding these limitations for ourselves, and in visualizing data. The images below represent an attempt to understand patterns of influence and connection between some of the individuals whose social media usage we investigated, both within and without the SoE. The outer circle represents all followers, the red lines in each case the re-tweets by the named individual. This can be seen more clearly on the second, larger, image.

Retweeted/Mentioned People

screen_name	people
alisonmpeacock	1331
beyondlevels	1812
dylanwiliam	847
earlyyearserica	1305
keith_turvey	1174
lisbundock	531
miss_mcinerney	890
schoolduggery	725
thomsonpat	1097

Total Retweeted/Mentioned
People: 7095
The circle:
The retweeted people (7095):
-the chord of the circle
The 9 people:
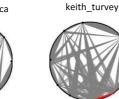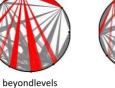*-black circles on the chord*
Retweets (131,264):
-grey edges

alisonmpeacock   beyondlevels   dylanwiliam

earlyyearserica   keith_turvey   lisbundock

miss_mcinerney   schoolduggery   thomsonpat

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schoolduggery	725
thomsonpat	1097

7095 very small circles
on the chord

9 small
circles on the
chord: the 9
people of
interest

Red circle:
alisonmpeacock

grey lines:
retweets by
everyone
excluding
alisonmpeacock

Red lines:
retweets by
alisonmpeacock

Key issues

Conceptually, danah boyd (2014) has discussed **context collapse** in relation to young people, to capture the idea that new media profoundly changes boundaries between public and private - demanding new kinds of practices for managing and creating privacy and publicness/ audiences. A related project in which the PI has been involved has identified an underlying economy shaping young people's social media engagements structured along the axes of **participation** and **visibility** (Berriman & Thomson forthcoming). These conceptualisations have proved particularly relevant to teachers and teacher educators, albeit in somewhat different ways. Participants referred to the Teaching Standards of Professional Conduct and Behaviour in justifying their concerns about social media usage. One survey respondent commented of Facebook 'this venue is fraught with danger in this profession and use must be minimized to protect oneself'. An SoE lecturer noted that he told his students to 'remove their photos from Facebook'. The public nature of social media sites threatened individuals' privacy and capacity to maintain boundaries between personal and professional lives. One SoE colleague had been 'stalked' online and received little institutional support in dealing with this. Teachers described the energy with which students attempted to track their personal social media sites, generally in what they interpreted as a privacy-invading rather than friendly fashion. It was agreed that institutional policies were contradictory and often devised by people who lacked familiarity with social media (for instance, one participant recounted being told not to use Facebook in teaching, but then being asked to 'like' the institution's Facebook page in ways that could have made her personal account more visible to students; at the time of our research a Local Authority had issued guidelines banning the use of Facebook by employees despite its evidently careful and productive professional use by some). Rumours abounded, such as an anecdote about a student teacher failing their placement because of critical comments made about the school on a 'private' Facebook group. Participants tended to support the **responsibilisation** of individuals rather than the agenda of 'digital rights' for which Hope (2014) and others have called, in spite of the contradictions of this. For example, it was often argued that one should be accountable for one's privacy settings, even while it was also acknowledged that one did not have control over what others posted about or tagged one in.

Enabling and sustaining **communities** of teachers and teacher educators was a key concern of the project. One issue that emerged is how one might enable and support teacher educators to engage in social media collectively rather than as individuals, thus enabling participation without necessarily entailing the visibility that many saw as unwelcome (see next steps, below). There was a concern that academics might become marginalized in educational debates unless they engaged more with social media networks. Another issue that was highlighted by the research was the role of gatekeepers such as professional teaching associations, and the funding dilemmas that mean these have to strike a balance between restricting access to paid-up members (to maintain a sustainable business model) and participating in public debates (by widening access to their resources).

As we have noted above, the same affordances of the **digital** have proved from this research to be both problematic and useful. Tools for digital data analysis have meanwhile not proved as helpful as might be hoped or indeed assumed, from the kinds of claims made about the value of 'big data' in some contexts. In particular, we have realized that it is important to make nuanced judgements about what constitutes 'good' or 'effective' use of social media rather than conflating high visibility with quality – more limited uses might be very effective for the communities they set out to serve, as seemed to be the case with some of our SoE colleagues who were usefully connecting students to sources of support and ideas at a local scale.

In terms of **policy**, we note our participants' active distrust or lack of engagement with networks that feature in analysis of the Global Education Reform Movement (such as certain academy chains or promoters), yet which appear to have more influence in terms of policy-makers' thinking. The disconnect between the latter and the perspectives of teachers and teacher educators might be seen as a cause for concern.

Next steps

Despite many participants' evident enthusiasm for online resources and websites, 50% of our survey respondents did not feel that they had 'an effective social-media based PLN'. There is certainly scope for considering what 'effective' PLNs might involve and look like.

We are interested in pursuing ways of encouraging good practice and quality control in social media PLNs e.g. website awards, kite marks, centres of excellence. This could be extended to consider 'good' or 'better' uses of social media and amplifying ethical codes and issues in public fora. We are keen to extend our discussions with colleagues in health, youth and social work, and are working with the UoB social media manager, Mark Higginson, to do so.

We intend to develop issues that arose in relation to the role of teaching subject associations, as we had not expected these to be so prominent in people's accounts: there is considerable potential for influence on practice here (albeit less so in terms of policy).

There is also an urgent need for critical and pedagogically-informed analysis of freely available and commonly mentioned online resources as a service for education professionals; and to understand further the archiving, 'classificatory imagining' (Beer, 2013) and use of these materials.

Towards the very end of the project, we discovered that two colleagues in the SoE have over the previous year been developing and building, in their own time, a social media platform that enables participants to share practice and build their professional profile - @staffrm, which they describe as 'long form twitter'. This has been designed specifically to overcome some of the dilemmas of social media based PLNs (for instance, using a 'recommend' button rather than the more common like/dislike buttons; using real names; building the community by invitation to ensure a context of trust; enabling longer but still manageable posts) while also benefitting from their more positive affordances (for instance, to build community in a non-hierarchical way and across geographical divides). We intend to observe and participate in this community as it develops over the next few months, because it may well represent a model of **good practice** that merits wider dissemination.

In addition, we are interested in how teaching professionals might be supported to engage in social media collectively rather than on an individual basis, and this will provide the basis of reflections with colleagues during dissemination activities. As we suggest below, it was evident that the discussions we held as part of the project were highly valued by those who took part, for both learning and critical reflection and comparison: we will develop and extend these activities in our programmes of teacher education, see below.

Impact

As a pilot, investigatory study it is difficult to quantify impact beyond our immediate professional learning networks at the moment. We continue to analyse findings and will disseminate them as suggested below. However, it is already clear that there is a need for teacher education to address more explicitly how to develop positive online media profiles and PLNs rather than (as now) emphasizing the dangers of social media and individual responsibility for privacy. We will therefore engage with our colleagues in the SoE to build this element into our programme provision, and subsequently with other schools of education / teacher education providers and training professionals in youth and social work.

Dissemination

Our findings will be useful to a range of groups and individuals. In the first instance we will address our immediate, local networks and consider strategies for our own work in the UoB and making better use

of social media networks. Our findings will be written up as a blog entry for the Education Research Centre blog edres.info. We also intend to disseminate our findings at conferences: we will submit an abstract for the 7th **Critical perspectives on professional learning** conference to be held in Leeds in June 2015, as well as to the BERA and UCET 2015 conferences, as well as via articles for academic journals.

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Teacher Professional Learning Networks and the 'politics of circulation': Case for Support

Context and Rationale

This proposal is to develop a pilot, interdisciplinary, critical investigation of one facet of the digital transformation of communities and cultures: the growth of social-media-based Professional Learning Networks (PLNs). It will focus on school education professionals (teachers, teacher educators and leaders) and on networks motivated by concerns for comprehensive, equitable, research-informed schooling provision and practices.

Some existing literature is optimistic about the potentially positive impact of mobile and digital technologies on professional development. Studies have identified how PLNs might extend access to resources, materials, communities and expertise beyond geographic and temporal boundaries; promote new kinds of 'curatorship' and engagement with others in flattened hierarchies; even provide more 'fulfilment' and 'authentic' learning than traditional professional development routes (e.g. English & Duncan-Howell 2008; McLoughlin & Lee 2010; Mackey & Lewis 2011).

Others are more guarded. Beer (2013) describes how the 'remediation' of academic life through social media influences both the communication *and* production of knowledge. He argues that the 'politics of circulation' in social media may appear democratising and decentralising, whilst actually obscuring and silencing some important visions of the social world. Kennedy et al's work for CCN+ (2013) has shown that social media analysis and use by many public sector organisations is still underdeveloped, with limited access to or understanding of tools that are themselves not easily interrogated.

School education is a particularly interesting site for study. In England, it is undergoing accelerated change, fragmenting into multiple 'communities of practice' with competing claims to moral and pedagogic authority, which in turn are likely to influence professional identities, practices, and school cultures. Ball (2011) describes the education policy field as 'heterarchic', involving global, local, multinational, commercial, state and non-state organisations, from HEIs, Local Authorities and quasi-autonomous public bodies, to start-ups, edupreneurs, knowledge companies, social enterprises, individual headteachers, and free school or Academy chains. His research traces 'transnational advocacy networks' across social media and other sites, through which key individuals and organisations promote neoliberal marketised or privatising policies and practices, such as for-profit educational provision. Commercial influence can also be seen in how many contributions under the popular hashtag #ukedchat consist of links to commercial software 'solutions' to educational 'problems'. However, there is as yet little research investigating networks informed by concerns for equitable, democratically accountable and research-informed schooling provision and practices. This study aims to close this gap, building on the work of Kennedy et al (2013), Albarran (2013), Beer (2013), Ball (2011), Pykett (2009) and others to understand how to conduct social media analysis in this context, and to comprehend patterns of influence in education policy and practices.

The project will have enhanced research 'yield' through synergies with concurrent studies, in particular *Beyond Levels* with Dame Alison Peacock of Wroxham Transformative Learning Alliance, exploring equitable primary assessment strategies. *Beyond Levels* has an active social media presence, which will be one focus of study. One Department for Education-funded project researching its approaches is underway; it is also the subject of a larger grant application to the Education Endowment Foundation. In addition, Sara Bragg's role in *Promoting reflection on the digitalised cultures and spaces of schooling* (part of a Higher Education Academy initiative on 'the distinctive contribution of HE to initial teacher education', PI Sara Bragg) and *Face 2 Face: tracing the real and the mediated in children's cultural worlds* (PI Prof Rachel Thomson, ESRC National Centre for Research Methods) is particularly to explore the implications of digital cultures for school education. Nadia Edmond is coordinating a School of Education three-year study of the impact of mobile technologies on the practices of teacher educators.

Aims

- To interrogate the claims made about the participatory and developmental potential of social-media-based Professional Learning Networks, using the example of teaching professionals as an analytically rich vantage point from which to examine the 'politics of circulation' in new media.
- To engage HEI-based teacher educators, recent graduates, partner schools and other organisations in dialogue about online communities and how these might be shaping teacher educators', schools' and newly qualified teachers' professional cultures, identities and practices
- To understand better how to operate, analyse and organise within digitally shifting professional environments; in particular to support teacher educators in using social media to amplify the voice of academic research and maintain commitments and values, and their capacity critically to engage with the 'politics of circulation' in educational policy and practice.
- To consider the potential to develop this pilot into a larger study covering a wider range and type of professional network (such as youth workers or health professionals as well as teachers).

As one of the largest sites of teacher education in the UK, the University of Brighton School of Education (SoE) probably reflects the range of responses to social media in the teaching profession more generally. Some colleagues actively engage with social media personally, professionally and pedagogically; some have research profiles related to educational technology and digital learning identities (e.g. Loveless & Williamson 2012; Rudd 2013); whilst others are daunted by the scale and volume of the blogo- and Twitter-sphere, which one colleague likens to 'standing in front of a water cannon'.

This project will investigate how PLNs emerge and are used, what kinds of knowledge content they might favour, their patterns of amplification, visibility and impact and where particular 'nodes' of influence and power are solidifying. For instance, whose tweets or blogs do SoE lecturers and recent graduates most commonly follow and why? Whose voices are being circulated, disseminated, whose might be being silenced, and how does this contribute to professional 'communities'? What kinds of 'journeys' through networks of ideas can we trace by understanding the politics of algorithms, the use of tagging and online commentary? (How) can we begin to chart the circulation of particular ideas across different social media sites and through different temporalities (such as, intense debates about particular policy announcements in education, or longer term trends)? How do our 'local' professional development communities relate or compare to the kinds of transnational policy networks identified by Ball (2011)?

Format: The project will:

- Collate samples of the public, professional social media networks of teacher-education colleagues in the SoE (based on voluntary participation); of the same amongst recent SoE graduates working in schools (alumni will be contacted by email and invited to participate); and of other prominent social media presences in education communities, such as @BeyondLevels.
- Work with experts in social media analysis within the UoB, including its Social Media Manager, Mark Higginson and Dr Theo Koulouris, and tools described in Kennedy et al (2013) such as Brandwatch, to understand how to 'data scrape' and analyse these samples and the broader context within which particular networks are situated.
- Engage SoE colleagues and colleagues in our partner schools and organisations in discussions and workshops about the value of social media in relation to professional learning in/about education.
- On the basis of emergent data, consider how to develop further research that extends our findings and approaches to other professional contexts.

Outputs

Work carried out for the proposed study would contribute, alongside findings from the other projects mentioned above, to the following:

- Presentations at international conferences, notably the *European Conference on Social Media*; and BERA (British Educational Research Association).
- Brief report to UCET (Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers).

- Two papers submitted to respected, peer-reviewed international journals related to technology in education and professional development in education
- Further research proposals extending the approaches used in this study to include other Schools of Education and teacher education providers and other professions such as health and youth work.
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Timeline

See attached Gannt.

The project will start on 01/05/14 and run for 6 months until the end of October 2014.

Key participants

Dr Sara Bragg is Senior Research Fellow in the Education Research Centre, University of Brighton. She was previously RCUK Research Fellow in Child and Youth Studies at the Open University and worked at the University of Sussex and the Institute of Education, London. Her doctoral research brought cultural and media theory into dialogue with classroom ethnography to produce new insights into young people's relationships with popular culture and into media education pedagogies. Her subsequent work has similarly aimed to be empirically based, theoretically informed, and methodologically reflexive. She has researched and analysed debates about media and 'sexualisation' (e.g. Bragg 2011, 2012). She was the researcher on a Teaching and Learning Research Programme project on pupil voice (e.g. Bragg 2006, 2007) and has led research into the work of the creative learning programme Creative Partnerships on youth 'voice' and school 'ethos' (e.g. Bragg & Manchester 2012, 2013) in ways that aim to conceptualise and account for the contemporary significance of these notions, and how they are produced through specific practices. She will take overall responsibility for project management, design, and writing up.

Dr Nadia Edmond is Assistant Head of School in the School of Education. Her research is concerned with socio-cultural approaches to understanding the discursive practices of 'professionalism' and the construction of professional identities with particular focus on the relationship between formal and informal learning in professional development. This has resulted in a number of outputs concerned with the theorisation of the role of work-based learning in programmes such as part-time Foundation Degrees (e.g. Edmond 2013, 2012, 2010). The workplace and its communities of practice as a context for informal learning is increasingly supplemented by digital networks and Nadia's more recent work has sought to articulate the inclusion of digital technologies and networks within professional practices. She is currently coordinating a project within the SoE to examine how digital technologies and networks come to be included within collective and shared notions of professional practice (Edmond 2013). Her role will be to integrate findings from this and existing projects, and to recruit and liaise with participants.

Mark Higginson is Social Media Manager responsible for managing social media activity across the University of Brighton; his role focuses on student recruitment and retention, internal communication, online PR activity through the representation of the university's research and the training and development of colleagues in social media practice. He has eight years commercial marketing experience, six of those spent working in the field of social media for international corporate clients. As part of this project he will be assisting with the 'network view' of PLNs, including how we gather and analyse relevant data, what we expect to find based on existing network theory, how we represent the actors within these networks and what influence the structures we discover have on the development and use of these networks (cf Zhang et al 2013, Marlow 2005). He will offer advice, analysis and run a workshop with SoE colleagues about social media use and analysis As this is part of his remit, his time will not be charged to the CCN+.

Dr Theodore Koulouris is Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies in the School of Arts and Media at the University of Brighton. A key responsibility is designing, convening and leading core and elective undergraduate modules in social media: *Producing and Consuming Social Media* and *Social Media: Applications and Debates* designed to explore theories and practices of social media in contemporary culture; reflect

on the role of social media in both professional and academic contexts; develop students' understanding of critical approaches to the study of social media within the field of media and cultural studies; critically utilise and evaluate convergence media theories and practices in order to understand how meaning is both constructed and deconstructed through a variety of media forms; enable students to refine their social media processes. His role will be to advise on connecting the project with debates in the academic literature on social media.

Justification for Resources

Costs of project – see attached. The total cost at 100% fEC is £3,971. If funded, the cost to the CCN+ would be £3,176

Staff costs

Sara Bragg – 5 days

Nadia Edmond – 1.5 days

Data scraping expertise – 1 day

Non-staff resources

Conference fee (£350) for the *European Conference on Social Media* 2014 = £280 at 80%

- The UoB is hosting the *European Conference on Social Media* in 2014 so costs will be kept low (involving the fee only).
- We have included a small amount to buy in data analysis expertise.
- We have included hosting costs for meetings with school partners

In addition, note the following:

- The SoE will cover costs for the BERA conference thus there will be no charge to the CCN+. (Conference fee, travel and subsistence for BERA conference for two people = £1200).
- The UoB currently has a Brandwatch subscription that costs £400 per month, enabling us to use it for the purposes of our project without charging the CCN+.

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