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Creating Authentic Online Learning Experiences Through Personal Learning Networks

Erin Gratz, Bettyjo Bouchey, Megan Kohler, Monica Simonsen, Jessica Knott

Wednesday, November 20th, 3:45pm
OLC Accelerate 2019 - Teaching & Learning Effectiveness Track
Agenda for our session

• Introductions

• Goals for today:
  • Identify the benefits of Personal Learning Networks (PLNs), and
  • Create a vision for implementation of a co-curricular experiment at home institutions.
Why did we look at personal learning networks as authentic learning experiences in online programming?

How did we do it?

• Qualitative, autoethnographic study in Summer of 2019
• N = 6 PLN members
• Research Questions:
  • What are the benefits of peer-to-peer learning?
  • How are peer learning networks (PLNs) models of authentic learning?
  • How can the benefits of peer-to-peer learning be used to deepen the learning of online students?
Baseline Knowledge: Personal Learning Networks

“being part of a ‘connected’ community provides support for getting specific needs met, solving personally relevant and meaningful problems, and developing professional expertise”

(Moreillon, 2016, p.65)
Baseline Knowledge: Authentic Learning

Authentic learning describes learning through applying knowledge in real-life contexts and situations.
How has a personal learning network you are part of or know about fostered an authentic learning environment?

- **Real-world scenarios**: gained a fresh perspective or solved a challenge.
- **Inquiry and thinking skills**: explored, thought critically, and collaboratively established meaning based on your own unique needs and interests.
- **Discourse with community**: expanded your learning & shared knowledge and expertise with others.
- **Empowerment**: generated new knowledge.
FINDINGS:
PLNs as Authentic Learning

Sets intentional direction for learning

Community of learners who are willing to learn from each other and share experiences

Provides a place to focus on individual learning and research through sharing ideas, shaping the direction of, and supporting one another

A safe space for critical inquiry through vulnerable and open dialogue that challenges assumptions and pushes individuals’ thinking

Engages in deep conversations and opportunities for creativity, new possibilities, & troubleshooting

Focuses on real world problems connecting theory to practice through collaboration
How could PLNs be incorporated into an online educational program to create a sense of community and authentic learning for online students?
Co-Curricular PLNs should be authentic learning experiences with meaningful connections.

PLNs create opportunities for cross-cohort connections, augmenting the academic experiences with meaningful connections.

Co-curricular PLNs should be topical allowing for self-selection and more buy-in in participation.
Your future

• What will you bring this back to your institution?
• Who would you need to pull into the project?
• What resources would you need?
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