Role of Emotion in Online Learning and Knowledge Production

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Abstract

In this paper, we will focus on the ways in which existing theories of emotion might be expanded to give a greater understanding of the ways in which learning takes place through dialogue and connectivity within a networked management leaning community. These issues are central within Networked Management Learning, which takes a social constructionist perspective on learning and knowledge construction, which assumes knowledge construction occurs during and through processes of relational dialogue. (Ferreday et al 2006). It is, we believe, consequently important to explore the socio-cultural issues that occur within this process of collaborative dialogue. Using examples from a recent empirical ethnographic study of a community-based networked learning programme, we will track the role played by emotion in the production and circulation of knowledge. We will examine how this takes place through processes of connection and disconnection through which members of the community identify (or dis-identify) whether as individuals, with other members of the community, or with the idea of 'the community' itself. We argue that specific emotions contribute to the development of connections within such a community, and that these impacts upon self-identity and the construction of knowledge about the world and one's position in it.

Keywords: Knowledge production, emotion in learning, relational learning, networked management learning.

Learning and Theories of Emotion

Within sociological theories of emotion, there is much emphasis on emotion as social. Emotion is not seen as an individualistic or wholly private experience; instead, it allows for an understanding of the mutually constitutive nature of public and private experience. Theories of emotion are concerned with the ways in which private feelings structure social identities and relationships, but also with the ways in which feelings themselves are not 'natural' but are socially constructed through relations of power and difference.

An awareness of these theories of emotion is particularly useful in management and leadership contexts, where emotion has predominantly been considered in terms of emotional intelligence. This concept, originally suggested by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and popularised by Daniel Goleman, (Goleman, 1995) focuses on the role played by emotion as a set of competencies that facilitate effective management and leadership, decision making and increasing productivity. At the same time, there has been increasing anxiety about the supposed 'emotionalization' of culture in the light of a growing 'therapeutic ethos', as Elaine Swan has noted (Swan, forthcoming). This is problematic in two ways: firstly because it understands emotion in an individualistic way through discourses of self-improvement, and secondly in its suggestion that emotion is (or can be) a self-aware performance over which one has control. What is missing from this approach, we would argue, is both an articulation of the roles played by *specific* emotions in processes of knowledge exchange and construction and awareness of the performativity dimension of emotion.

Turner, J. H and Stets J.E (2006) explain that the analysis of emotions, despite previously being an under theorised area in the field, has over the last three decades increasingly been seen as one of the cutting edges of theoretical work in sociology. It is interesting to look at their review and an earlier one by Thoitis (1989) as they provide a useful and insightful background to the way emotion in learning has been researched and theorised. Running through the theories discussed are the implicit idea of emotions being important in both responding to and constructing cultural norms and rules and, in addition, to the construction of positive (and negative) identities. It is assumed that people have multiple and varied identities which are positively or negatively experienced as a result of emotional responses to and from others. Many of the theories they discuss relate to expressions and feelings related to confirmation of self and identity in both a trans-situational and situational sense which effect the extent individual experience themselves and their identify with satisfaction, confidence and security or with anxiety, fear and loss of confidence. Power is central to this process: as they argue, the

emotional responses through which identity is constructed are mediated through expectations which are associated with a person's power and status within a given situation or group.

It is interesting in the context of this paper to look a little closer at Turner and Stets' discussion of exchange theories of human emotion. Here, they theorise emotion specifically in terms of networks: it is within networks that exchanges occur which arouse emotion. Within this theoretical perspective, notions of connection and 'reachability' among actors in the network are seen to contribute to actors overgeneralising from positive exchanges at one part of the network to expectations of positive exchanges with others in the network who are reachable and vice versa. In their summary of the key features of exchange theories they comment that\;

> *The more frequently that exchanges occurs among individuals, especially when they are mutually dependent on each other for resources, the more likely the positive emotions of liking, pleasure, satisfaction, interest and excitement will be experienced and expressed to exchange partner and more likely that these partners will develop commitments to the exchange relationship, and as a result, the more likely that negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and uncertainly that arise in exchanges will be muted, thereby reducing the costs of exchange and raising net profits for each partner in the exchange.* (Turner and Stets, p.46)

Turner and Stets' discussion of exchange theory, whilst it is limited by a somewhat over-deterministic feel to the discussion on the effects of emotions, nonetheless offers some interesting ideas about the way emotions impact on actors in connected networks. These ideas may have some relevance to the interactions and exchanges between learners within a networked learning community within which until now there has not been much examination of the way emotions are aroused and the impact they have upon individuals, relationships and on learning.

In another review, Thoitis (1989) points out emotions are signals to the self but are also signals to others and the object of others' responses (Thoitis p332). Taking this idea further Scott, S (2003) explains that Denzin (1984) argues that emotions are "temporarily embodied, situated self-feelings" which are highly dependent on our perceptions of others and their (imagined) perceptions of us. Emotional practices can therefore, she states, be seen as *social acts* which are significant in revealing the complex interrelationships between the individual and society via the body. Emotions, in this sense, have no meaning outside of the words used to describe them; consequently, it is more important to look at the social practices from which these labels emerge. In her own work on the 'sociology of shyness', she explains that such an approach shifts the focus of attention away from the idea of individual, private worlds of emotion to the wider context of social relations and the way in which language is used with power to identify and stigmatise certain 'types' of people or subject positions.

Fineman (2004) points out similarly that the current interest and trend to focus on emotional intelligence risks trapping people in hierarchical categories from which it can be difficult to escape (725-726). By seeing 'emotion' as a single, unified category in this way, the emotional intelligence model arguably fails to engage with the complex emotional and interpersonal dynamics that take place in learning environments.

Sedgwick and Frank (1995) draw on Tomkins extensive 4 volumes work on Affect, Imagery, Consciousness to explore these ideas in a non- essentialist way. To Sedgwick and Frank the attraction of Tomkins' work is that he finds 'a different place to begin'. Tomkins neither denies nor privileges a biological and cognitive position to emotion or a social constructionist and affective one but rather examines the interconnectedness of these two positions in neither a determinist nor dualistic mind/body oppositional way. They state, Tomkins consistently argues that relevant stimuli for affect systems include internal as well as external events. They explain that he firmly concludes that there is no basis – and certainly not the basis of internal versus external – for definitional distinction between response and internal or external stimuli. They point out that Tomkins clearly distances himself from behaviourism preferring to see affect in terms of "any affect may have any 'object'" or put another way they say he believed that the complex interleaving of various and many aspects of internal and external effects and states 'is to make the individual care about quite different states of affairs in quite different ways' The important point is that Sedgwick and Frank, drawing on Tomkins, locate in the body some important part of the difference among different emotions. There is on the one hand, in the position taken by Sedgwick and Frank, no denial of the relevance of the visceral/bodily experience of emotion but, on the other hand, this does not mean we can easily know the impact and relationship between emotions upon cognitive behaviour – as they comment:

"Thus it is the inefficiency of the fit between the affect system and the cognitive system – and between either of these and the drive system – that enables learning, development, continuity, differentiation. Freedom, play, affordance, meaning itself derive from the wealth of mutually non-transparent possibilities for being wrong about an object – and by implication about oneself (p 511)

Brookfield (2001) describes, for example, how a defining feature of his own experience as a student participant in discussions was to feel a constant and overwhelming compulsions to perform and how reflection on his own experiences of participating in discussion groups helped him to recognise that they are emotional battle fields where members are vying for recognition and affirmation from each other and from the discussion leader. He describes how in his own case his energy often became focused on listening for a comment to which he could respond and as a result did not listen to the merits of different points being made. He states that educators should 'resist the temptation of hurtling precipitously and mindlessly into such (small group) exercises'.

We will discuss the impact of emotions on learning and the relevance of both Tomkins theory of affect and Sedgwick's work to the examination of emotions and learning more below. However, what is important to note here is that it is possible to question the idea of emotion as biological, without denying that emotions, while socially constructed, have material effects on bodies, and therefore impact deeply on individuals' lived experience of learning communities.

Traditionally the relation of emotions to learning has tended to be discussed in terms of the motivational power (driver) of emotion to learning. However Dirkx (2001) states there is a growing body of research that consider emotions are much more than merely a motivational concern for learning. He quotes Postle (1993) who argues that affective, emotional dimensions provide the foundation on which practical, conceptual, and imaginable modes of learning rest. For Dirkx feelings and emotions assist us to know ourselves as indivuated beings within the broader social world.

One theorist who addresses the problem of seeing emotion as a unified or single category in the way Fineman claims proponents of emotional intelligence do is Christine Ingleton, who attributes this unified view of emotion to the Cartesian dualism that underpins Western approaches to education which privileges reason over emotion (1999: 1). This is not to say that we want to invert this, and to privilege emotion over reason. Indeed, the idea that emotion is more 'authentic' than reason is itself problematic, as recent research on emotion has shown (Berlant 1997, Ahmed 2004). Nevertheless, we would agree with Ingleton's argument that emotion has been undervalued and under theorized despite its centrality to the learning experience. For Ingleton, emotion is intimately connected with the construction of a learner identity, and the key emotions she focuses on in this respect are pride and shame. Scheff describes shame as the 'master emotion', which ties together the individual and the social, as well as 'allowing us to regulate how far we are from others' (Scheff 1991 cited in Ingleton 1999: 2). For Ingleton, pride and shame are deeply implicated in the operation of power within learning environments. In this sense, her work intersects with the wider sociological debates around 'affect' discussed above that have arisen in response to Silvan Tomkins' work. Tomkins saw emotion in terms of affect, and identified nine primary affects that are seen as universal within human social interaction and which are sorted into positive and negative. The affect is simply the initial, involuntary response one has to an object or an other, whilst 'emotion' consists of the cultural narratives and discourses that become attached to these primary affects, and which then go on to play a structuring role in social roles, identities and interactions. The crucial point is that the positive affects result in a movement toward the object while the negative affects result in a movement away (Tomkins 1995).

Cultural theories of affect have also attempted to identify primary affects, dwelling in particular on the centrality of the pride/shame dynamic in identity construction, as well as their importance in forming social norms (and thus determining what comes to be seen as 'knowledge'). For example, more recently Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick places shame at the centre of individual and collective identity construction. Following Basch, Sedgwick suggests that shame represents the failure of "the smile of contact": it is a reaction to the loss of feedback from one's peers, and as such indicates social isolation (Basch cited in Sedgwick 2003: 36). In this way it disrupts the communication with the communication that is central to identity construction (2003: 36). Unlike guilt, which results from one's actions, shame is essentially relational: it arises as the result of being unable to elicit an

approving or positive response from another. This means, she argues, that shame is essentially a performance (37-38). Similarly, she notes, the performance of pride can be an inversion of the shame that normatively attaches to particular states or conditions: think, for example, of gay pride marches, or the 'black is beautiful' movement of the Civil Rights era (2003: 62-63). If shame is performative, it has the potential to be transformed into pride, but such transformations are likely to become the site of contest and/or conflict. For example, the debates around emotion and gender that Swan explores are precisely concerned with the question of whether emotionalization equals feminization and, if so, whether or not this is shameful (Swan, forthcoming).

Emotions in online learning

Emotion in online learning has not been theorised to any extent up until now. There has been a lot of interest in online identities and playing with identity from Turkle (1995) onwards. There is a fascinating examination of this topic in a special issue of Educational Philosophy where, for example, Burbules (2002) and Blake (2002) both take issue with Dreyfus's original work on anonymity versus commitment and the dangers of education on the internet, also discussed in the special issue (Dreyfus 2002). Blake makes the point that in internet based education students are named and are not anonymous and that they can and do construct identities for themselves in written interactions – and goes on to state that Dreyfus' claim that essential dimensions of emotion, commitment and risk are not possible online is by no means patently true, quite the reverse (Blake 2002). He further comments that there is nothing intrinsic about DE that precludes risk or commitment and that we take risks with a commitment to 'people' and not just to their bodies and that do not our beliefs about such risks relate to our knowledge of or assumptions about their imagined history?

Blake's view concurs with a study by O'Regan (2003) who interviewed students who were studying online and found that emotions were critical to their described experiences of working online. She identified as significant, frustration, fear/anxiety, shame/embarrassment, enthusiasm/excitement and pride. And, in addition, she explains that 'participants in the study reported particular contexts in which those emotions seemed to inhibit or enhance the teaching/learning processes'.

We thus believe it is interesting to explore further, through the examination and application of theories of emotion/affect, the impact of emotions in learning and, specifically, in networked management learning with its emphasis on the importance of relationships and the construction of knowledge through relational dialogue.

Emotion and Connectivity

So far, we have suggested that it might be useful to draw on theories of affect in order to pay more attention to the roles that *specific* emotions play in networked learning. In particular, we have outlined how Ingleton's model of shame and pride might be useful for understanding the dynamics of social learning and the construction of learner identities. This model resonated with certain aspects of our findings, especially in relation to the ways in which narratives of feeling proud or shameful are mobilised to produce social norms within the group. However, we would suggest that it is necessary to build on this understanding of shame and pride in order to avoid constructing these two emotions as binary and/or oppositional states that exist independently of one another. Emotion, after all, is necessarily subjective; furthermore, the emotions that are produced within the learning group do not exist in a vacuum, but are embedded in the learner's everyday experience. In a previous paper (Ferreday, Hodgson and Jones 2006), for example, we drew on a particular case study to examine students' experience of academic language. We found that whist students described feelings of inadequacy in being unable to understand academic jargon, this was expressed in terms of resistance – a desire to 'throw the book across the room'. If we were to read this example in terms of pride and shame, we could say that there is a moment of shamefulness, which is transformed into pride (at being able to articulate one's ideas without the need to use jargon, for instance). This transformation might come about as the result of reflection, or of being able to draw on the resources of the group. This suggests that pride and shame are interconnected, rather than oppositional categories.

Another problem with the notion of pride and shame involves our position as researchers. In some cases, students' experiences seemed to resonate with the theory, but they did not articulate them in these terms; are we, then, to 'read off' that a student is feeling shameful in a certain exchange, even if

the student does not say this herself? To do so feels invasive, as though we were 'psychoanalysing' the student. It also means that we risk reproducing the notion that particular kinds of 'failure' in learning are 'naturally' shameful – in other words, mobilising a discourse of shame in a way that reproduces our privilege as researchers. In the example above, the student described said, 'I get annoyed as you can tell, I get emotional', suggesting that negative emotion constituted a barrier to learning. However, whilst the effect of this 'emotional' response was one of distancing, it is very clearly articulated in terms of anger, not shame. This returns to our earlier point about accounting for the roles that specific emotions play in the creation and sharing of knowledge.

In order to address these concerns, we would suggest that it is useful to reframe the pride/shame dynamic suggested by Ingleton and others. It is possible to do this by returning to Tomkins' model of affect. For Tomkins, all emotions originate from a primary affect, which is seen simply as a response either towards, or away from, an object. The charged categories of pride and shame can be seen in this way: rather than fixed categories, they can be seen as one way of thinking about emotion as a means of being *connected* or *disconnected*. For our purposes, then, it is more instructive to think about how emotion contributes to the complex processes of connection and isolation that characterise the networked learning experience. This is not to say that pride and shame do not play a role in the learning process: but we also need to be aware of other emotions including anger, fear, desire, trust, distrust, joy and surprise, to name just a few. Rather than reducing emotion to a 'primary' binary set of emotions, we would suggest that this approach allows us to account for the ways in which emotion works in practice within a learning community. By thinking in terms of connection and disconnection, it is possible to identify the themes and processes that take place in a social learning setting, whilst still doing justice to the lived experience of individual students.

Another effect of this approach is to position emotion as central to the construction of both individual and group identity. As Sara Ahmed notes, 'emotions… are bound up with how we inhabit the world "with" others': they are about 'the intimate relationship between selves, objects and others' (2004: 28). What is more, emotions are not simply authentic and biological: they can be staged and mobilised, or conversely hidden, in order to produce particular effects which are bound up with the production of knowledge. These performances of emotion – both one's own and others' - work to position members of a community in relation to each other.

It should be noted here that in claiming that emotion is performative, we do not intend to imply that it is a performance. Indeed, the EI model is problematic precisely because it assumes that there is a single, correct way of 'doing' emotion that is desirable because it results in increased productivity. It is highly problematic, we feel, to assume that emotion can be commodified in this way. However, we believe that it is equally problematic to criticise emotional intelligence using narratives of authenticity or by appealing to the discourse of self-expression which suggests that individuals simply 'have' (real, authentic) emotions, which can be 'got out' through group work. Instead, a social-constructionist approach would suggest that the self is constantly being created through interactions with others, and that emotion plays a central role in this process. Furthermore, since emotions themselves are constantly being produced through a complex interplay of social interactions and personal histories, it is problematic to suggest that individuals take on the responsibility for substituting more appropriate or productive emotional behaviours. Indeed, the question of whether emotions were appropriate, as well as the problem of how to be oneself (or which self to be) within a group caused considerable anxiety for our respondents, and one of our aims in this paper is to suggest ways in which this anxiety could be re-framed as a potentially productive critical reflection on the relationship between identity, emotion and knowledge within a networked learning group.

Finally, we also see emotion as central to power relations. For example, when one feels shame in relation to a tutor or fellow student who is seen as more knowledgeable, this produces that individual as having authority: and as Judith Butler has noted 'all performativity rests on the credible production of "authority"' (1997: 151).

The experience of emotion in NML

Theoretical speculation about primary or dominant emotions aside, in our study of a networked learning community one emotion in particular dominated participants' memories of their induction into the learning community: fear. The programme studied had both residential and online components. For

most participants, their first engagement with others in the learning community occurred during the first week-long residential workshop at the beginning of the two year Masters programme, although they had access to the online discussion space beforehand. These two responses, recalled in semi-structured interviews towards the end of the first year of study, are typical:

> *I would say that many people we spoke to off* [sic] *the whole group, by the end of the first week, most of them would say scary, traumatic, stepping into the unknown where they really wasn't sure whether they wanted to go there*

> *it was very scary stuff, very scary*

The participants were clear that they wanted to learn through dialogue and discussion; on the first day of the workshop, one student told us of his frustration with the organizational culture in his place of work, where senior staff avoided communicating using email. During this conversation, other students agreed that refusal to engage in dialogue could be, as one put it, 'a power thing' that worked to reinforce the status of those already in power, as well as limiting others' access to particular forms of privileged knowledge. However, this equation of disconnection/disengagement with 'power' also implies an awareness of the risk involved in choosing to engage with others, and the fearfulness and anxieties associated with that risk. It is particularly interesting that in the quotation above, the experience is described as 'traumatic'. As Leigh Gilmour has argued, trauma is intimately connected with questions of identity, memory and emotion. Gilmour points out that narratives of trauma have become pervasive in contemporary autobiography despite the fact that they are experienced as 'that which breaks the frame,' raising the question of whether the self can ever be written about in an 'authentic' way through writing (2001: 8). Whilst this comment was intended humorously (and does not refer to 'real' trauma), it can nonetheless be read as representative of the ways in which group learning poses a potential challenge to one's sense of individual identity by requiring that one be open to others.

This question of openness has been discussed by post-structural theorists of online learning. Sara Mann, for example, has reflected on her own experience of networked learning to suggest that practices of identity management are crucial in joining a learning community, and that the anxieties associated with issues of identity become exaggerated rather than mitigated in online space, since one is 'visibly inscribed in the text' (2003: 115). It should be noted that her case study involved a purely online learning community, in which learners did not meet each other face to face, and there was no designated social/general discussion space. Mann examines how the resulting sense of posting into 'a void' with unknown respondents encouraged learners to focus on their own identity and finding a voice within the group (2003: 116). For Mann, whilst this self-consciousness is an integral part of joining any learning community, it is also a potential barrier to community. She argues that in order to have an ethical learning community, it is necessary to be open to the Other in the shape of students, tutors and even the subject itself. This openness, she says, requires one 'to not reduce the difference of the Other to the known of oneself' and 'to give up one's need to establish one's autonomy' (Mann 2001, cited in Mann 2003: 122). This notion of being open to the other is suggestive: it implies that any attempt at learning that does not engage with issues of power is a wasted opportunity: new knowledge is produced *across* the boundaries of existing power structures, not within them. This recalls the work of the feminist writer Margrit Shildrick, who argues for the power of 'leaky' boundaries, or recognizing that 'the boundaries of exclusion are never wholly secure against the threat of the absent other' (1997: 10). By recognizing the potential to cross boundaries, Shildrick claims, it is possible to create new kinds of knowledge and dialogue from a stance that is 'committed to a moral sensitivity both to individuals and to community' (1997: 122). However, Mann's account of her experiences becomes a narrative of failure. Somewhat reminiscent of Brookfield's earlier comment, she explains that she did not achieve openness to the other. Instead, she says, she was more concerned with 'finding my place in an imagined community and finding a voice to express my thoughts on the subject of study' (2003: 122):

Mann's proposal is that whilst self-concern is 'the learner's privilege,' it must change in order for communities to work (2003: 122). This is supported by our findings, which demonstrate the importance of moving from a position of fear (which could be experienced as isolating), to one of trust (experienced in terms of connectivity). However, the suggestion that she failed in the work of 'being open,' a task which is ironically presented as the private concern of each individual within the community, is more problematic. This recalls Shildrick's critique of the liberal, individualistic model of community in which 'co-members of the moral community become "others" … unless firmly

assigned to object status' (1997: 199). There is a danger of seeing oneself as 'that which is not Other' in contrast to the exotic other who is 'out there,' 'in the void', unseen and unknowable, but to whom one courageously 'opens up'. Whilst it is undoubtedly essential to be aware of the tendency to 'reduce the Other to the known of oneself', it is also important to avoid either fetishising Otherness (by assuming that knowledge results simply from coming into contact with those one has designated as 'Other'), or reproducing a power dynamic in which the Other is implicitly positioned as inferior and in need of help ('taking responsibility for the Other').

One conclusion to be drawn from our own study is the importance of providing space to reflect on the learning process, and hence facilitate the forms of openness that were lacking in Mann's experience of online learning. However, it is also important to be aware that openness may not always be wholly desirable or positive. It is instructive here to return to the participant cited above, who described the learning experience as 'very scary stuff'. It is clear that the fear in this account results precisely from a sense of boundaries being threatened, whether these are the boundaries of conventional experiences of learning, or boundaries of self and identity. The notion of 'leaky boundaries' suggest that the fear arises when one fails to embrace and accept this perceived threat to one's boundaries, and by doing so to become more 'open' to others. This suggests that fear is wholly negative, and that it ultimately threatens the success of the learning community. However, it is also possible to read fear as a way of thinking through the actual processes involved in negotiating boundaries. After all, the participants who described feeling fearful also spoke of the need to 'deal with' their fear in some way through reflection. Despite the fact that fear is potentially a disconnecting affect, they did not simply walk away. Instead, the students attempted to address this potentially isolating affective response, not by breaking down boundaries, but by re-constructing them.

The earliest postings on the group discussion space illustrate one way in which members of the group attempted to work with and overcome their fear. After the first workshop, some students elected to post 'biopics', short biographies summing up the individual's career, interests, and expectations from the learning community process, in the group discussion space. These autobiographies were the first items to be posted to the discussion board. In all, eight of the fifteen students contributed. Of these, three already had considerable experience of online discussions, and these went on to be initially the most prolific users of the online space during the first year of the course.

What is interesting about these postings is that they did not take the form of a dialogue; students simply added their own biopic to the same discussion thread, but did not comment on each other's postings. One student posted his contribution in the form of an attached web document, the preferred form for posting written work and course assignments, further adding to the sense of distancing as well as of individual authorship. All of the biographies followed the same format: each gave professional details first, with personal information included at or near the end, and all but one made references to being too busy, or struggling to 'fit in' learning alongside the demands of career and family. Another characteristic is the repeated use of self-deprecating humour, as in the following examples:

> *This is getting boring now so to quickly wrap it up...*

> *As many of you will recall (possibly) from the residential I live in X*

> *I spent a number of years working for a range of businesses whilst I qualified as a management accountant. However, I always took trouble-shooting jobs, for those who couldn't imagine me as an accountant - however, I promise to keep the kitty safe!*

The humour in these examples works by suggesting either that the subject him/herself is boring and/or forgettable, or by casting doubt on his or her professional competence. These implications are of course contradicted by the career histories given by the students, all of which show high levels of experience and competence.

The content of these biopics can be seen as representing an acting out of some of the anxieties described by participants. Indeed, the term 'biopic' itself is an interesting choice, since it is more commonly used for films about famous or notorious individuals and thus has connotations of both individualistic identity, and performance. In informal interviews, one prolific poster who contributed to this first discussion emphasized the need to get the discussion going by posting 'something – anything'. However, it is significant that these postings took this specific form of performing professional and

private identity within a space designed for dialogue. As we have argued elsewhere (Ferreday et al 2006), it is possible to see all texts as dialogic, and these texts can certainly be read in this way since they were written with a specific audience in mind. However, the form taken by these particular texts is implicitly rather than explicitly dialogic. Information is given in a way that is open to comment/feedback, but does not specifically invite it, and in fact nobody chose to post comments or questions in response to the biopics. This form of writing thus suggests that the desire to 'use' the space exists in tension with the need to articulate an individualized self. On the one hand, the online discussion space represents the possibility of 'being open' by inscribing oneself in a text that will be seen by the group. However, the experience of posting in an almost empty space can be seen as mirroring that of walking into the residential workshop for the first time which, as we have seen, is likely to be experienced as 'very, very scary' as well as potentially exhilarating. The choice of the biographic form can thus be read as indicating a need to re-assert the authority of the individual self. Indeed, it can be seen as a desire to 're-cover' the painful emotions of fear and even trauma described above, by setting a routine and unemotional writing exercise. If the trauma of performing in public is experienced as a 'breaking of the frame', the conventional CV/autobiographical form is precisely a way of framing experience such that it becomes easily intelligible to others.

This is not to say that emotion is absent from the autobiographies, however: it is everywhere and nowhere. If the writing of a conventional autobiography can be read as a way of being more comfortable in the online space it is also potentially a source of anxiety, in that it involves displaying oneself to the group. In the above examples, the humour reveals traces of anxieties about appearing pompous or boring, almost as if writing is a form of speech in which the writer risks monopolizing the reader's attention for too long. Similarly, the frequent references to business suggest anxieties about one's ability to engage fully with the learning experience, as well as perhaps suggesting anxiety about which version of the self can be appropriately displayed in this particular forum. The references to family, travel and interests suggest that the subject has a hinterland and is not solely interested in work, but they also point to the possibility of multiple selves and identities, and to the insecurity involved in performing the 'personal' self before a group of acquaintances. This is not necessarily to say that the postings 'fail' to be open to others. Indeed, it could be argued that by revealing personal information, however structured, students are precisely 'opening up' their lives and identities to the group at large. Nor should we read these utterances as 'failing' to engage in dialogue; although there is no explicit exchange of dialogue within the postings, the task itself arose as a result of group discussion, and the postings themselves assume the existence of a community of readers. They can therefore be seen as implicitly (rather than explicitly) dialogic. Whilst autobiography can be seen as an individualistic form that echoes Mann's experience of 'finding my place in an imagined community and finding a voice to express my thoughts on the subject of study'. The value for the group of individuals 'finding a voice' should not be underestimated. For the MA participants, most of whom had not engaged in formal higher education for many years, the question of finding a voice (and especially a written voice) is a highly emotional one. The autobiographies can thus be seen as a way of writing oneself out of the fear described above, of establishing an identity *within the group*. By definition, online postings are intended to be read by others; this means that they are always implicitly dialogic. Instead of requiring a level of 'openness' that might only serve to increase fear, the biopic form allows learners to engage with the group without the feeling of 'unsafeness' that might result from overly 'leaky' boundaries. The subjects are engaging with others, but within the safe boundaries of the offline self that is grounded in the everyday responsibilities of career, relationships and families. Dialogue thus emerges from finding a voice whose boundaries are intact, not from indiscriminately attempting (or hurtling precipitously and mindlessly) to break down boundaries. This helps to create a social space in which boundaries might be later challenged.

If fear was the dominant emotion in the early stages of the process, another negative emotion that became important was frustration. Some students reported that decision-making took too long, particularly in sessions where the whole group gathered together. One student described the meeting room as a 'stage,' on which some members were keen to 'make a speech'; this led to meetings lasting too long, which meant that other students felt frustrated:

> *I'm not one of these people who would sort of get frustrated and – well we've just been talking about half an hour about nothing at all!... There are some people who naturally would get frustrated with that and there are some people in our group who naturally get frustrated but I think they've learned to sort of bite their tongue a little bit and hold back.*

In this account, frustration is clearly, though not explicitly, linked to one's social position within the group. A learning community approach is based on principals of dialogic learning, so it is to be expected that decisions are made through processes of (sometimes lengthy) group discussion. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that frustration arose not only from the length of the discussion in itself, but from the fact that some students who felt more comfortable 'onstage' were perceived as dominating that discussion.

The respondent went on to suggest that the degree of frustration experienced by students was the result of different professional backgrounds, leading to different expectations. This together with the repetition of the word 'naturally' suggests that a difference in communication styles has become naturalized within the group, such that certain students will *always* have to 'bite their tongues'. However, the interviews revealed that a sense of frustration was virtually universal, even in those students who were perceived by others to be more fluent and more vocal in group discussions. This suggests a less polarized view in which, rather than representing a normative system in which some students are always more dominant (and the others are always frustrated), frustration is *the result of* emergent tensions within the group, arising from perceived differences in social capital.

It is interesting to note that, whilst the respondent quoted above clearly identifies to some extent with feelings of frustration, he is keen to distance himself from that emotion. Although he described himself as one of the less vocal students in group discussions, he distances himself from the negative emotion that requires others to bite their tongues. He does this through an appeal to the notion of natural professional differences, implying that he is able to overcome the distancing or divisive effects of negative emotion by accepting that such differences are bound to occur: in other words, by privileging reason over emotion in the manner described by Christine Ingleton. This response to the frustration of group discussions is by no means unique to this student; the question of how to deal with this problem preoccupied many of the students, and it was often addressed in a way that focused on rationalizing or on practical issues rather than on emotion. For example, a common suggestion was simply to impose time limits on all group discussions; the meetings in which members formed new learning sets was particularly singled out for this, indeed it was renamed '*speedy* set formation'. However, this rationalizing approach perfectly illustrates the limitations of such an approach, which ultimately works to normalize the very differences and breakdowns in communication that generated the frustration in the first place. Whilst such initiatives may reduce the amount of 'bad feeling' resulting from over-long meetings, they do not address the underlying differences and assumptions, or the emotions associated with them. By reinforcing differences in social capital, this potentially limits the kinds of knowledge that can be produced within the group, and the ways in which it can be exchanged. The importance of emotion, of the personal, in knowledge production is demonstrated by the fact that it was a social exercise that finally allowed the group to address this problem.

Towards the end of the first year, three students decided that there was a need for a further autobiographical exercise: one student described the purpose of this as 'general update to each other of what we were up to, what we were into' in order to 'enable us to make linkages' in order to develop potential dissertation ideas. This then developed into an exercise in finding out more about other students, which took a very different form from the biopic exercise above. Students organised an informal evening 'speed dating' session at a residential workshop towards the end of the first year, during which members of the group spent a limited amount of time together and asked each other three 'serious' work-related questions, and one 'personal' question of their choice (the question originally suggested was 'what attracts you to someone'). The answers were then added to a poster with information about each member. One of the three students who originally suggested the speed dating session described his answer to a question about what he would do at the end of the course:

> So everybody in the group had an opportunity to ask me questions because I was speed dating. And one of the things that came out was, how would you feel when this is all over and I actually said, I'm thinking pretty sad, I'm hoping I'll be happy and joyful that I have achieved what I wanted to achieve but I know I'm going to be sad about losing some of the people and not having this constant network, if we don't allow it to carry on.

The move from biopic to speed dating is interesting for thinking through issues of connectivity, identity and trust within the group. Rather than following a rigid format, the informal structure meant that questions could be more original and could throw up surprising information. This arguably allowed for the production of a more diverse and open model of identity which was less bounded by the

conventions of CV-style narratives of professional identity. Furthermore, the speech genre involved was more explicitly dialogic: the connotations of the term 'dating' suggest an exchange or conversation between two individuals that is intended to bring about greater connectivity, in contrast to the staging of identity suggested by the biopic model. The juxtaposition of questions about the course with more personal questions further points to an implicit understanding of the ways in which personal experience is not simply 'baggage' that has no place in the learning process: instead, it suggests that the group sees personal and academic knowledge as interconnected, and that it is necessary to share both in order for the groups to function as a 'learning community'. What is most interesting about the quotation above, though, is its emotional content. The respondent lists three explicit emotions (sadness, happiness and joy) as well as implicitly referring to a number of others including anxiety (about the programme ending), pride (in achievement) and the potential nostalgia and regret that may result from losing touch (although he also went on to express determination that this should not be allowed to happen). In informal interviews, this session was generally agreed to be a success, with one participant describing it as a 'turning point' in the group bonding process. Another participant's view is typical of the responses:

> [t]he last residential was really great fun and the speed dating and everything was just such a laugh. We really got, we really threw ourselves into it and we do seem now to have got to grips with this idea of making decisions about what we want to do next and managing our time

By requiring students to discuss both work and personal lives, in a setting both formal (within the classroom) and informal (after hours and over a drink), this exercise seems to have opened up a space in which they could move beyond the negative emotions of fear and/or frustration, and this seems to have led to students both experiencing, and discussing a wider range of more positive emotions. However, perhaps the most interesting outcome is that this process is credited with improving the group's ability to hold constructive discussions and to make decisions. This suggests that making space for engagement with others in the group plays a crucial role in promoting connections within the groups, which in turn impacts on learning and knowledge production. It should be noted however that this is an ongoing process of interaction and negotiation with others and the connections made can just as easily be lost as personal and collective agendas come into conflict. Attention and time given to dealing with the ensuing emotions generated is necessary and continuous. But as the final comment from one student made online at the end of the course illustrates it does/can make a difference to the experience of online learning;

> I have gradually become more used to discussing things over the site. Not something that I was particularly comfortable with in the beginning. Not sure of all the reasons why, but at the start I am sure one or two reasons were around a lack of confidence in my own ability in academic circles and able to receive feedback in open space like this. This got easier and quite comforting at times as months passed

Conclusions

In the above examples, the specific emotions we discuss – fear and frustration – are experienced by students as both an effect and a cause of disconnection. Both these emotions are naturalized to some extent, but whilst fear is seen as a natural effect of joining a new group (and thus one that changes over time), frustration can be much more disabling. The image of quieter group members biting their tongues in long discussions suggests a situation in which those members are not able to share their knowledge with the group; moreover, it also suggests that certain forms of inequality, and the emotions that go with them, can themselves become part of 'what the group knows': it becomes common knowledge that certain students dominate discussions, for example. However, the relationship between emotion and knowledge is not simply confined to individual experience: it is central to the relational dialogue through which knowledge is constructed.

The above example of the speed dating, and the highly emotional responses to it, would seem to support Sarah Mann's argument that it is desirable to open up to others in the group, but it also suggests that this is only possible once a space is created in which members of the group, not only those who are seen as having particular emotional skills and competencies, are able to participate. This suggests that collective, as well as individual emotions are important in understanding how knowledge is created through dialogue. To return to Ingleton's model of pride and shame, both these emotions were highly relevant to the development of the group we studied. However, they are not individualized:

when the respondents describe their frustration at the slowness of the decision-making process, there is a palpable sense of shame in what is perceived as a failure on the part of the group to function in a more effective manner, and to overcome or work with individual differences in communication style. Similarly, the respondents who speak of the success of the speed dating exercise refer constantly to a sense of collective success as well as personal pride. This, it seems, was only possible as the result of a process which enabled learners to experiment with different ways of constructing and performing identity which slowly shifted from an individualized identity, to one which was more identified with the group: in other words, that gave them the social space within which to construct a leaner identity. Ultimately, the success of this process depended on creating a space which allowed individual emotions to surface, as well as creating a sense of belonging and pride within the group. By encouraging the circulation of both academic and personal knowledge in this way, this exercise enabled students to connect with one another, creating the potential for new knowledge to be constructed.

On the basis of our study, it appears to be possible, as the result of processes that enabled learners to experiment with different ways of constructing and performing identity, for a learning community/group slowly to shift from an individualized identity, to one which was more identified with the group: in other words, gave them the space to construct a 'leaner' identity. Ultimately, the success of these processes depended on creating a space which allowed individual emotions to surface, as well as creating a sense of belonging and pride within the group or sub-groups. By encouraging the circulation of both academic and personal knowledge in this way, we identified activities and processes that enabled students to connect in a different way with one another, thus creating the potential for new knowledge to be constructed.

In summary we believe that, drawing on more sociological views and theories of emotion, it is ultimately impossible to separate learning and emotion; they are intertwined. What is more we would suggest that without examination of individual and collective emotions it is not possible to understand how a networked learning community functions or operates but neither is it possible to control or predict how people within it will respond to each other. Contrary to what is suggested by proponent of EI we can not harness and control emotions to produce more 'effective' learning, we can only be aware that emotion does have a material effect on learners and on their experience of themselves and of the learning community.

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Acknowledgments