



**Through the wall of literacy: transformative practice in social networks among GCSE re-sit Further Education students**

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4 ***Through the wall of literacy: transformative practice in social networks among***  
5 ***GCSE re-sit Further Education students***  
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14 *“Don’t go getting at me about them words and tha”* - Billy, 16  
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17 *“People who use tools actively build an increasingly rich implicit understanding of*  
18 *the world in which they use the tools and of the tools themselves. The*  
19 *understanding, both of the world and of the tool, continually changes as a result*  
20 *of their interaction.”* John Seely Brown  
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30 ***Key terms:*** Disorientation; visibility; thresholds; mobile learning; literacy;  
31 peripheral participants  
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38 This paper outlines the conceptualising of *lifeworld* experiences of students where  
39 literacy is situated in online learning social networks used to support studying of  
40 formal qualifications. The paper draws on social learning theories and distils data  
41 from individual-participatory content posted to the social network Edmodo.com.  
42 Using a phenomenological lens of ontological experiences as they occur online, it  
43 finds potential shifts in dispositions towards learning and literacy through the  
44 visibility of online actions. Underpinning the theoretical presentation is a  
45 pedagogical design of network-situated writing tasks aimed at inducing individual  
46 agency through a gradient of thresholds to online participation. The thresholds  
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3 may be viewed by students as barriers or experienced as apprehensions. They are  
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5 accompanied by key participatory decisions which position the network as a site  
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7 of transformative practice. Where such decisions are accepted, these may  
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9 support the integration of 'peripheral participants', apprehensive about  
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11 increasing modes of technological provision, to community interaction towards  
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13 objectives.  
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### 16 17 **Context: Edmodo as social learning network**

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19 Edmodo.com is an application available for mobile and desktops that is highly  
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21 similar in appearance and functionality to Facebook. Teachers can open free  
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23 accounts, create a 'closed' social network (i.e. invisible to others not within the  
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25 network) and invite students to set up profiles, which appear as individual pages.  
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27 The main posting area is a wall of activity which, on log in, shows the latest posts  
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29 by those in the group. The teacher-researcher's posts tended to be organisational  
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31 reminders, learning strategies, questions, discussions and resources. Other  
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33 functions include polls, quizzes, and a message service. The teacher-researcher  
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35 would either post notifications beforehand, in order to draw attention to the  
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37 forthcoming lesson, or after, as reflective questions, reminders or lesson  
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39 resources used. Within lessons, the network was used for submitting work,  
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41 collating student notes, and accessing task instructions. A conduct of use was  
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43 explained to students at the outset of the course and that participation was  
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45 expected of students in lesson times and that accessing and participating outside  
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47 lessons could enhance their learning experience and progress.  
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### 52 53 **The Aim of the Research**

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3 The notion of 'initiating' a disorientating dilemma may be ethically controversial  
4 when considered in behaviourist terms (Baumgartner, 2012). Here it is based on  
5 the assertion that literacy is a social instrument and the educator responsible for  
6 developing a student's language capabilities for cultural participation. This  
7 includes the inculcation of personal literacy into social and participatory affinity  
8 spaces (Gee, 2004) that technologies provide by design.  
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17 In conventional pedagogic design, language is often entrenched in private spaces  
18 between educator and student, for instance, in discrete conversations as  
19 feedback or embedded between the pages of exercise books and restrained to  
20 classrooms. Such ways maintain a learning dialogue framed on the power of the  
21 educator and the curriculum – where literacy is conflated with 'English' and the  
22 object of activity is in satisfying the institutional and authoritarian outliers  
23 defining 'literacy'. It is argued that this position prohibits a dignified and dialogic  
24 approach for emergent adults in Further Education (FE) on the threshold of  
25 entering into society. For adults returning to education, FE offers opportunities  
26 for social inclusion and to re-write past academic histories (Duckworth and Ade-  
27 Ojo, 2016). Where community is promoted, framed around the central tool of a  
28 network, associative identity changes occur through a shared language and  
29 cultural practices, including logging in to the network, reading and posting  
30 content.  
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47 Seeking to promote alternative modes of provision (Smith and Wright, 2015),  
48 online networks were re-purposed as sites of fostering transformative learning  
49 through a personal and social development of literacy. This design is framed as  
50 mobile access to a community, teacher and a curriculum through a social network  
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3 where a continual educational dialogue can be open and sustained. Partly this  
4 was made to assist adults undertaking the short, intensive GCSE (General  
5 Certificate of Secondary Education) re-sit course in evening classes, by adding  
6 another layer to the single two hour face-to-face classroom lesson that students  
7 were timetabled for by the college. The educator used the network to support  
8 learning content from within the classroom through mobile access. Inquiry  
9 prompts developed engagement with the course and reminders promoted self-  
10 regulation towards progress and outcomes. Reflection on learning activities from  
11 the classroom was triggered by the notification function of social networks as  
12 prompts. It was forecast that if a momentum of interpersonal communications  
13 occurred through the community, then this cascade from teacher to student  
14 could gradually recede and student intrapersonal communication would arise to  
15 develop studentship and academic discourse.

## 31 **Methods**

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34 The network was used by four separate groups of 16-19 aged students and 19+  
35 aged adults, with a constant comparison made of their activity and  
36 communication. A content analysis was made of students' posts to the network,  
37 with the codes sorted thematically to examine how students used the network to  
38 support themselves and each other. Interviews were held with students across  
39 the two years to explore perceptions of the network and the community.

## 48 **Further Education context**

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51 The current provision for Further Education offers routes for literacy that are  
52 limited by two characteristics. Firstly, the curriculum model is based upon a locus  
53 of failure – framed as English GCSE as a re-sit subject. Results nationally appear to  
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3 accentuate low self-esteem for students leaving school who, on entering  
4 vocational training colleges, must re-sit a qualification they haven't achieved. It is  
5 well known that the GCSE re-sit is beset with practical problems (provision,  
6 facilities, staff skills, student engagement) that impede success (Higton *et al*,  
7 2017). Alternative modes of literacy in FE are in Entry Level 1 and Functional Skills  
8 qualifications – both regarded as bridges towards GCSE completion.  
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17 Secondly, these qualifications are fine-tuned to the requirements of employers  
18 (ETF, 2016), framing literacy as an instrumentalist endeavour for vocational ends.  
19 Such routes to literacy development in supporting the vast numbers arriving to  
20 undertake the qualification impose constraints upon the temporal design of  
21 provision. Though curricula content is routinely identical to school delivery, the  
22 time allocated for provision is typically 2-3 hours over 32 weeks, as opposed to a  
23 standalone course across two years. In these ways, 'English GCSE' is  
24 simultaneously the same and different to what was experienced in school: the  
25 same subject, packaged and processed in less time for those who have failed it,  
26 who are required to take it on mandatory terms.  
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39 Where students undertake literacy purely on the basis of previously attained  
40 school qualifications, access to and perceptions of literacy development are  
41 diminished and corrosive. School-leaver FE students are confronted with a  
42 timetabled decision routinely situated to corridors and doors, and articulated as:  
43 "*I have to go to English now*". Populations physically diverge and segregate into  
44 failures and passes and the labyrinthine transition into FE as a site of educational  
45 opportunity becomes fraught with divisive tension and apprehension.  
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3 While vocational, Further Education's purpose and scope exceeds work-based  
4 training as transformational sites of activity on personal levels. Each year, people  
5 cross the threshold of the college entrance in a decision that precipitates  
6 potentially life-changing action. Yet those among the 5 million "functionally  
7 illiterate" adults [i] who seek literacy development are given a narrow choice. The  
8 standard is for a course that may recall long-standing affective experiences  
9 garnered in school: repeating the GCSE. This is problematic in the sense that the  
10 opportunity for transformation to be reified is based on mechanisms (classrooms,  
11 curricula, teachers, timetables) that represented academic challenges in the past.  
12 Simultaneously, the course offers a chance to rectify, but under stringent time  
13 constraints that many adults don't have the luxury of meeting.  
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17 It may be unsurprising that lower GCSE pass rates affect those from  
18 disadvantaged backgrounds the hardest (Paton, 2012). Many of those students  
19 will proceed to Further Education where they are compelled to repeat the course  
20 with those from the most deprived areas making the least progress at resitting  
21 (Exley, 2016). Opening up provision to alternative modes of both delivery and  
22 pedagogical design promotes FE as a more inclusive and innovative environment  
23 and one with transformation and self-efficacy at its core, over dominant models  
24 of literacy, such as that framed in the GCSE syllabus, which perpetuates a schools  
25 narrative fixed solely on the capability to pass. In this version, the disadvantaged  
26 may lack the cultural capital to which the syllabus is geared for success. Cultural  
27 capital (Bourdieu, 1986) describes the assets provided by an environment which,  
28 in the context of an English GCSE course, include the material and symbolic assets  
29 that constitute the syllabus (e.g. reading, printed books, mannered conversation  
30 around those objects, standardised accents, i.e. Received Pronunciation). To  
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3 those with cultural capital, such objects are taken as a given and a norm, rather  
4 than an aspiration or an outlier from the norm. The English GCSE was drawn from  
5 an environment back into which it flows and where it becomes the standardised,  
6 dominant literacy.  
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12 Those arriving from disadvantaged backgrounds have increased work to do to  
13 achieve the GCSE, and they are often aware of it. In FE, the GCSE rarely  
14 symbolises cultural capital and, once secured, the GCSE qualification represents a  
15 permit to cease engaging with such formal literacy ever again and FE students can  
16 pursue vocational courses with practical skills. To some students, the compulsory  
17 resit represents a different field and 'game' altogether and symbolises the end of  
18 formal education.  
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28 Cultural capital is correlated to social mobility; therein literacy, to which cultural  
29 capital belongs, becomes equated to material capital. This is in evidence by those  
30 using literacy as a defining asset, vehicle and, ultimately, a barometer for  
31 economic self-improvement. In such a sense, literacy is underscored with an  
32 instrumentalist paradigm of education: a means to an end, where developed  
33 literacy skills furnish agents with the utility of improved vocational prospects.  
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35 When this is taken as the focus of education, literacy becomes commoditised and  
36 the qualification signifies little more than a product that perpetuates a dialect of  
37 power where lifelong literacy is impoverished and success is defined by the  
38 '*knowing other*' of the teacher, the institute or the examination board. Upon this  
39 environment, dominant structures are reproduced (Duckworth, 2013). Further  
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52 Education colleges have long represented critical spaces in which notions of  
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3 'formal literacy' are challenged as belonging beyond the teacher, curriculum or  
4 classroom but as contextualised everywhere (Ibid).  
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8 Alternative perspectives see literacy as a process of enabling self-actualisation, as  
9 uncompromisingly personal and equating *learning* with *becoming*. Such a view  
10 might be seen as derivative of New Literacy Studies, particularly the work of  
11 Barton and Hamilton (1998) outlining how literacy practices are situated directly  
12 in everyday social life, with reference – for example – to fields of interaction  
13 where literacy is vibrant and vital – the discourse of family life (Duckworth, 2015),  
14 the workplace, the streets or the texts of popular culture. Faithful to this, literacy  
15 development was promoted in this study through the use of online social  
16 networks, utilising the learning community and drawing from the co-operative  
17 interactions generated by members.  
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### 30 **The affordances of networks and online communities**

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33 Networks may serve as contexts suited to Dewey's theories of learning based on  
34 transactional relationships between people, environment, action and  
35 communication. Biesta synthesises these as integrated contexts: "an ever-  
36 evolving transactional field" (Biesta, 62: 2009) in which the 'organism' is not only  
37 respondent to stimulus (as in Behaviourism), but perpetually active and ready.  
38 Biesta goes on to state that organising a transactional context means creating  
39 opportunities for participation. If this is the case, through mobile residency -  
40 initiated by becoming a network member - a variety of affordances may arise.  
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51 The congregational affordances for members to interact around learning  
52 technologies are predicated on visibility. Such technologies, based on open  
53 communication, may re-position the individual and community as author and  
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3 audience, with the network acting as publishing platform. Common interests,  
4 such as a mutual objective, enmesh groups to committed participation (Yorks and  
5 Marsick, 2000) and may positively affect motivation to contribute (Alvermann *et*  
6 *al*, 2012). When technologies like Virtual Learning Environments and Social  
7 Networks become learning tools they give options beyond the spatial and  
8 temporal boundaries (Kearney *et al*, 2010) of classroom lessons to promote  
9 flexible access in keeping with adults' approaches to learning. A sense of agency is  
10 promoted that allows for differentiated approaches. Merchant (2006) and boyd  
11 (2007) have proposed that networks promote an authorship of the self. Content  
12 (and simultaneously contributions) are user-generated and can be multimodal,  
13 shaped as video and image to represent text or ideas; content may also be  
14 straightforward: resources provided by the teacher, tasks and reminders, or as  
15 inquiry (Crook, 2012) between community members. These affordances have  
16 significance in the current efforts to increase digital and online provision in post-  
17 compulsory education (FELTAG, 2014), but more pertinently to the FE student for  
18 whom conventional learning contexts may hold tensions.  
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38 In summary, mobile technology provides affordances of access to (curriculum)  
39 content, a community and educator. Members may change perceptions of  
40 content, less as teacher-driven and more as co-created. Through their  
41 contributions, the student becomes co-author of the network and their content,  
42 mediated by language, is socially situated. In essence, when the member checks  
43 in to the network, they take actions that reposition them as community  
44 educators, since they instantly become responsive to the actions, activities and  
45 inquiries of their peers.  
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## Peripheral members

While vocational, FE colleges also represent social inclusion, particularly among adult students, and are conduits for community integration. FE students are often regarded as having been marginalised by circumstance to social and academic inclusion (Passey *et al*, 2008). This is acute when the notion of Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger, 1991) is broached as an approach to organise student communities. Much side-lined in discourse around this social learning theory is the significance of '*legitimate peripheral participants*'. In the current setting of education, the peripheral is problematized as not participating, hard-to-reach, or of students in perpetual circular motion (Atkins, 2016) not making progress, leading to debate around how to engage such individuals. Yet apathetic students cannot be equated to latent members in a community: the peripheral cannot be misconstrued as disengaged. A central principle of a CoP is that *community* assumes 'membership', as if the peripheral will become naturally drawn to the core (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999) and as if everyone regards the learning group as a co-operative community.

The 'peripheral' is not simply peripheral due to uncertain knowledge or by lurking that necessarily becomes centralised by osmosis, but for varied reasons that make the construct of a CoP naturally uneven. Northey *et al* (2015) point to attitudinal tensions as individual dispositions. Other reasons may include a friction in language and relationships between a core of confident members and its clustering around authority (educator/institution), as well as questioning the procedures of *how* to become central to participation – and whether this is the desired locality for the peripheral participant. These tensions are necessary to

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3 recognise when aiming to espouse learning groups as communities and when  
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5 utilising tools that are determined by co-operative interaction.  
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8 If procedures to construct CoP are constrained by the educator/curriculum,  
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10 significant gatekeepers arise as barriers to participation for peripheral members,  
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12 who may resist interaction due to deeply affective and attitudinal obstacles that  
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14 prohibit a shift in disposition. Further to this tension between the peripheral and  
15  
16 the core are notions of access – an issue also problematized in FE, where funding  
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18 has been so significantly reduced that access is difficult to manage for many of its  
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20 population with multiple domestic obligations and/or significant learning needs.  
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### 23 24 **Thresholds of engagement**

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27 Affective and attitudinal barriers are positively regarded as *thresholds* in this case  
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29 study. '*Thresholds*' is a deliberately used term, adapted from Meyer and Land  
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31 (2003), who describe the process of learning as navigating conceptual stages  
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33 [thresholds], whereby students experience an epistemological transformation  
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35 related to the schema of troublesome knowledge on a course of study. Such  
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37 transformations, it is argued, can be deeply affective and characterised by an  
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39 internalised resistance by students, though is irreversible once acceded to.  
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43 Here, the conceptualisation of a similar transformation as a social and ontological  
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45 phenomenon where it is located in online spaces is proposed. This paper will now  
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47 set out these stages, before leading to strategic pedagogical tasks aimed at  
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49 inducing a shift in habitus necessary to initiate a transformational experience.  
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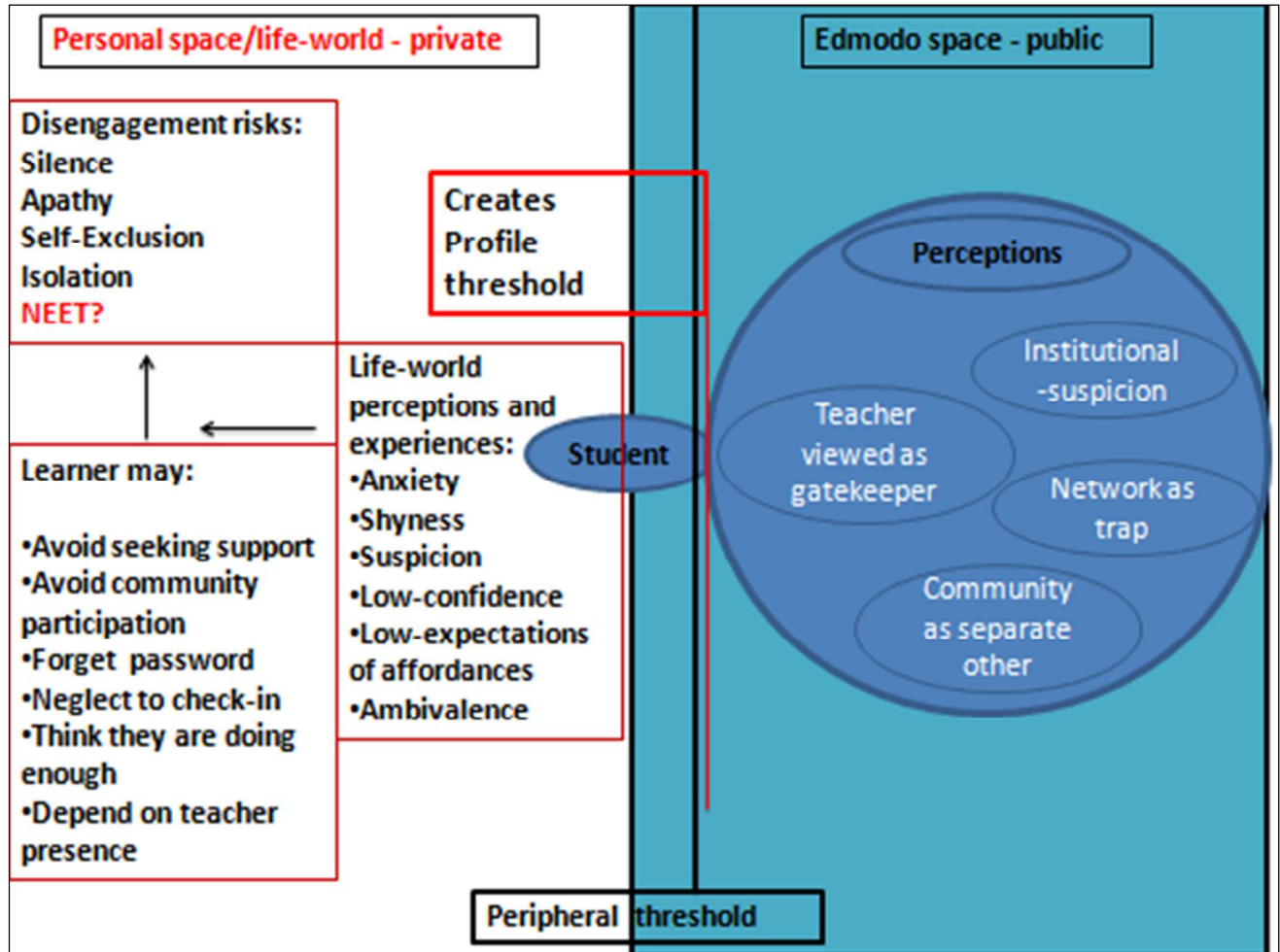
### 51 52 **Methods used to organise data**

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3 A coding of the posts to the network wall was made and an organisation made of  
4 students' online profiles sorted into user groups according to their frequency of  
5 activity. Individual profiles were labelled 'High-Engaged Users' (HEU) and 'Low-  
6 Engaged Users' (LEU). HEUs tended to be highly motivated students in the  
7 classroom as well as online; a greater range of types of posts were made as a  
8 result, e.g. HEU asked and answered learning questions, made self-organisational  
9 checking posts (i.e. '*Are we allowed to take texts into the assessment?*'), shared  
10 examples of their work, and gave feedback and encouragement to others.  
11  
12 Meanwhile, LEUs made fewer than five posts altogether in a term, which typically  
13 expressed confusion about learning tasks or were notifications of absence or  
14 lateness. These codes were clustered together into 'types of posts' and arranged  
15 as a continuum of engagement to show variance in use of the network. It was  
16 then possible to identify and invite a cross-section of the participants for  
17 interview, to ensure that LEUs views of the network had equilibrium with HEUs.  
18  
19 To complement this data and establish naturalistic inquiry, observations were  
20 drawn from participants' reactions to use of the network in classrooms where it  
21 was blended to learning activity. This was made in order to record incidence of  
22 attitudinal references to the network. The resulting data was systemically  
23 analysed in an Interpretative procedure, using Initial and Substantive coding,  
24 clustering codes to themes. These were sorted in varying ways, including a visual  
25 representation.

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49 Firstly, the below image shows a mapping of common codes clustered from a  
50 coding of communications within the network. Shown on the right in the blue  
51 shaded areas is the LEUs view of the network. Typical attitudinal perceptions are  
52 shown that were drawn as common. Rather than perceive the network as  
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assistive to goals, the student experiences ambivalence towards what are perceived as gatekeepers: the educator, the institution and potentially even the student-community, which may be seen conspicuously.



The peripheral student looks in from the outside and checks the landscape of the space. However, this inward-facing position is of curiosity, while others face outwards negating community participation. This is a primary threshold and constitutes a key decision that is similar to perceptions of the classroom environment, but with a fundamental difference. The network is an assistive technology and not mandatory, but the educator presents how it *can and will* support progressing actions. Here, encapsulated, is an initial disorientating

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3 dilemma dependent on a decision of whether to enter the network and  
4 participate or not. The student may well know that a network, so functionally  
5 familiar to recreational habit (i.e. Facebook) holds certain expectations. Two are  
6 significant: firstly, a community is present, which a student may be ambivalent to;  
7  
8 secondly, an awareness of visibility and openness – that in the network, every  
9 action is vulnerable to surveillance. The student has to choose whether to  
10 negotiate this terrain with all of the pre-existing affective experiences that  
11 constitute the personal disposition of the peripheral participant, shown to the left  
12 in the map above as including shyness, low-confidence, and suspicion.  
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23 In comparison to Land and Meyer's (2003) thresholds, this first stage has  
24 similarity with the cognitive jolt prompted by engagement with 'troublesome  
25 knowledge', where students willingly tackle such challenges and "begin their  
26 journeys as professionals in that discipline."  
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33 The transformation in 'beginning a journey' is undertaken when students' consent  
34 to network participation. It is proposed that the corresponding stages of ontology  
35 precipitate a shift in dispositions. The stages are clustered from data drawn from  
36 communications posted, interview responses and observations of network use  
37 among students in the classroom. These are outlined below as phenomena  
38 accompanying the ontological thresholds to online contexts:  
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47 ***Thresholds of Situated Mobility: Ontological embodiment of online identity with***  
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49 ***Peripheral Participants to social networks.***  
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### ***Apprehension Threshold: Visible Incursions***

The first threshold, described above, was characterised by 'suspicion' and a resistance to engage, due to the openness of social networks. This threshold is a challenge for some students to overcome, as they see networks as an incursion on their private *lifeworld*.

Following this clearly problematic stage is a secondary gradient state of liminality.

### ***Navigation Threshold: Discovery***

This was characterised by a more inward-facing curiosity with the technology, such as network exploration, membership negotiation and domain exploitation. Students explored its functions and features, drawing conclusions on what they can do with this tool.

### ***Habitus Threshold: Situated Embodiment***

Characterised by: redefined personal membership and embodiment to online space, affective experiences such as (autonomous) disorientation and potentially frustration.

### ***Efficacy Threshold: Self-actualisation***

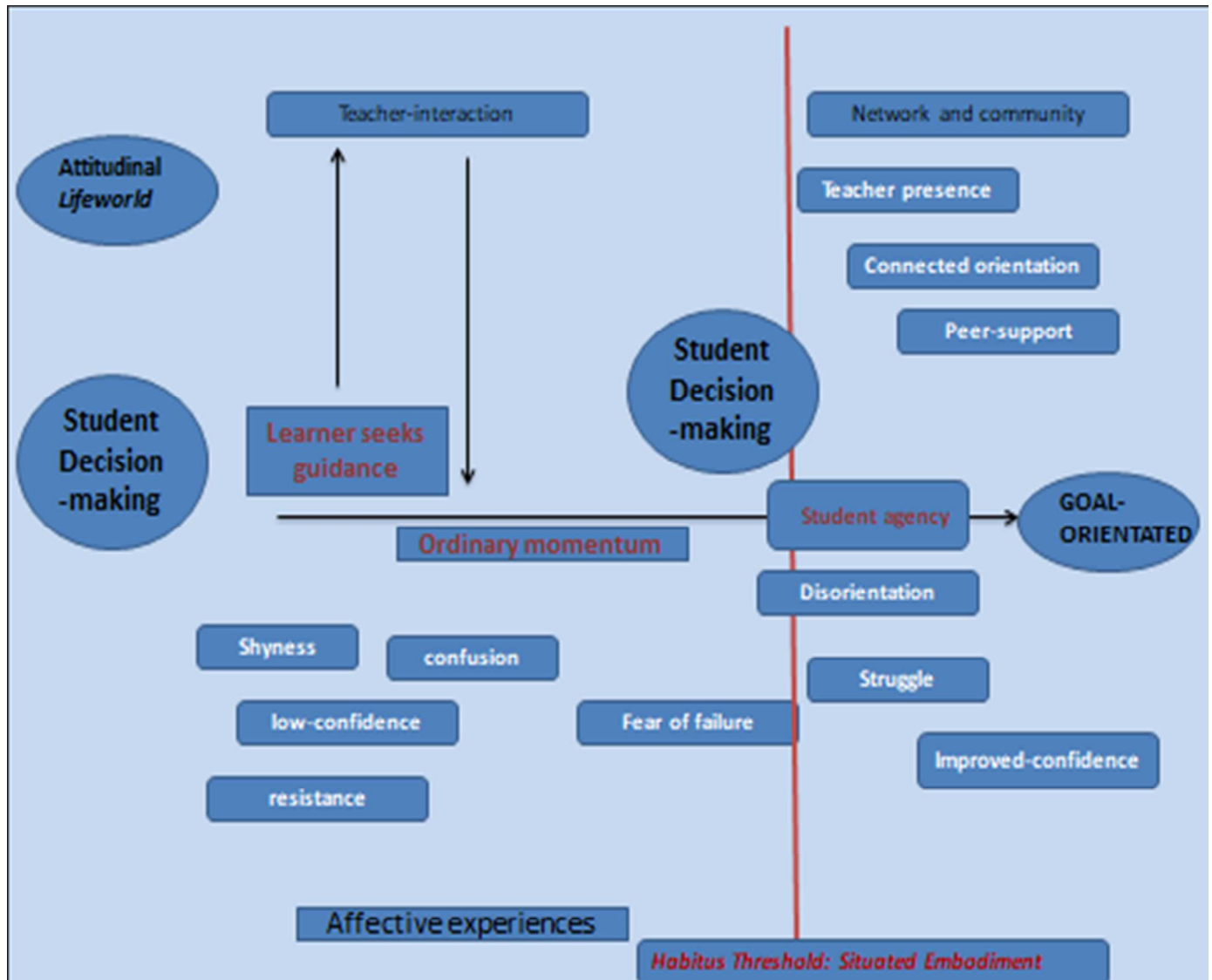
Characterised by: affective statements and declarative statements of intent to act

### ***Assimilation Threshold: situated interpersonal community interplay***

Characterised by: sharing information and resources, community questions and answers



The below image maps the actions through the case study, showing the momentum that occurs when students negotiate the initial threshold to become active participants in their community.



The assumption up to now is that 'membership of' the network requires an active presence and has fundamental value, taken as a given, by the educator and institute. This network is presented to the students as supporting their aims on their course of study. Benefits and uses are explained and demonstrated,

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3 followed by invitation to create profiles and make an introduction post – all of  
4 which occurs in the classroom early in the course. This initial view of the network  
5 already initiates a dilemma proximal to the first two thresholds (Apprehension  
6 and Navigation) and instigates the decision-making that accompanies all mobile  
7 stages of *'accept/reject'* what the educator is asking the students to do.  
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15 At each stage of acclimatisation to the network, the educator can help negotiate a  
16 meaningful presence for individual activity. At the point of communication posts  
17 being imprinted to the network, a process of ownership begins in relation to the  
18 network. Inter-personal strategies will help cohesion of the community that  
19 allows for the Assimilation Threshold to manifest and community interaction to  
20 flourish. Pedagogical strategies help groups to co-ordinate goals and objectives  
21 being realised. From an educator's point of view, this is valuable – with visibility  
22 supporting a reading of progress. From a peripheral participant's perspective,  
23 decisions of access are affective and can equate to distress and vulnerability.  
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35 Distress may be based on a fixed habitus: a self-perception of language capability  
36 that does not easily fit into a network predicated on a system of language that is  
37 'academic' in tone. Educators must be cognizant to this tension and model  
38 language that is inclusive and promotional to interaction, encouraging students'  
39 contributions. In this case study, this was apparent in early exchanges, with more  
40 confident students expressing their selves in the vernacular, before code-  
41 switching later to reflect a developing ownership of both the network space and  
42 curriculum-discourse. This can be seen as problematic, since it represents a  
43 compliance to 'correct' language use as prescribed, as if the language of academia  
44 must be embodied for learning to be attained. The network had a sociolect that  
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3 mediates a type of mastery process of concepts, where it represents a space in  
4 which to practise the language of curriculum in confidence-securing interactions  
5 through rich participation in academic discourse. Students described the network  
6 as “a base”, “safety net” and “security blanket”. However an interesting insight  
7 into the use of network tools was given in interview, where a participant shared  
8 their experience from the course:  
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17 *Mike: I think there's about five or six of the class that I've got on Facebook, like.*  
18 *But I could literally be talking to them on Edmodo ten minutes before about work*  
19 *and be on Facebook talking about something totally different.*  
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24 This reflects how members segue between networks in a transition of identities  
25 and sociolect reflected in the code-switching accompanying these transitions:  
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30 *Mike: I started getting a bit less self-conscious, you know. Like, at first you're like,*  
31 *“Oh, I want to make sure this is spot-on. We're going to post this on Edmodo.” But*  
32 *after a while, you're like... you could write something pretty quick and just put it*  
33 *up, you know, if you just had a quick minute. I guess we started getting less self-*  
34 *conscious. The only thing I was a bit conscious of, if we were ever on Facebook, I*  
35 *write, like, text language; if it went up on there I'd never want to write text*  
36 *language just in case the teacher read it. So I always started to use my full-stops*  
37 *and commas and write proper English on there.*  
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### 47 **Vignette – Mike (29)**

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50 *Mike was an adult student with dyslexia that had gone undetected in school. He*  
51 *has a high work ethic and on leaving school he started and ran a successful*  
52 *plastering firm for several years. Frustration had characterised his school life,*  
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3 which he pointed to when explaining that he loved the textiles classes, sewing and  
4 making creatures from fabric “with the girls” but that he kept getting sent back to  
5 English. Finally, one day he got angry and asked his English teacher permission to  
6 go to the bathroom and kept walking away, leaving school once and for all at 15,  
7 and not bothering to collect his exam results for nine months. For several  
8 subsequent years he worked before he decided to return to college to improve his  
9 reading in order to read his daughter bedtime stories and because he “didn’t want  
10 to be the worst reader in my family.” Mike described how he made up the stories  
11 when he read children’s books at bedtime, but his daughter “caught him” out as  
12 her own reading improved. This sense of hiding his dyslexia demonstrates the  
13 challenges of social literacy facing students such as Mike and entering college was  
14 an emotional experience for him. It appears a relief to him that the college  
15 diagnosed his dyslexia that his school hadn’t, which helped explain many years of  
16 his life history. Throughout the months of the first term he disclosed these  
17 difficulties to the teacher confidentially and sought close support. The teacher  
18 urged him to be more proactive in the use of the network to improve, but he  
19 avoided any action in it, stating adamantly “I’m not using tha”.”  
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41 Despite high levels of involvement in early lessons, Mike could become frustrated  
42 and on one occasion he became angry and walked out of the classroom with his  
43 belongings, but his determination to overcome past problems saw him return later  
44 in the evening. This ‘walking out’ triggered a key decision which he reflected on in  
45 interview without prompting, saying how he considered whether to keep going  
46 and leave the college that evening, but felt he had invested a lot into the course  
47 already, including – it seems – a stake of personal pride at going home. The  
48 decision to remain triggered renewed purpose; thereafter he became hugely  
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3 *involved in the network, posting his own work openly, encouraging and*  
4 *commending others work and taking responsibility in promoting group*  
5 *interaction. His determination saw him make progress and enjoy classes, but he*  
6 *didn't believe he could actually pass the course. By the revision leave period, he*  
7 *had passed all of his coursework at a strong level, his confidence was high and he*  
8 *surged with enthusiasm, posting exam papers, questions and answers. He*  
9 *declared his enjoyment of the course and the experience, stating that he didn't*  
10 *really care if he passed, but knew he had improved and had completed the course.*  
11 *He finished with the pass-mark of a grade C and expressed his intention to go on*  
12 *to study History.*  
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### 26 **Triggering a shift in habitus from language as *private world to public*** 27 ***performance*** 28 29 30

31 When the Community of Practice becomes accustomed to the domain, formal  
32 learning tasks can be blended to the network. As an environment, students  
33 become central to practices involving the group as they develop cohesion, with  
34 activities situated directly on the network wall. The challenge in the re-sit  
35 population is drawing peripheral agents towards objectives in collaborative  
36 approaches informed by pedagogy, whereby "object-orientated actions are  
37 mediated by cultural tools and signs" (Sharples, 2007:1). This entailed a  
38 repurposing of the network from a resource repository, mainly used by the  
39 educator, to an environment where students generated creative content. Re-  
40 purposing here is similar to '*internalisation*' (Kuutti, 1996) which involves  
41 '*reciprocity*' - where subjects using tools transform objectives, while the object  
42 transforms the subject. In this case, the network was re-purposed as a publishing  
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3 platform and the students became authors. The findings explore how this  
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5 prompted a transformation on members' perspectives of language.  
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8  
9 Within the context of the network-situated task (described below), the educator's  
10  
11 goals were in creating a disorientating dilemma based on the visibility of language  
12  
13 in the social network, which prevented participation. To induce peripheral  
14  
15 members to an open and proactive arena, students' actions were supported in a  
16  
17 collaborative manner, in order that the visibility of individual agents' actions  
18  
19 remained discrete in their collaborative set, but the act of openly publishing  
20  
21 incited a network presence through an initial imprint of action.  
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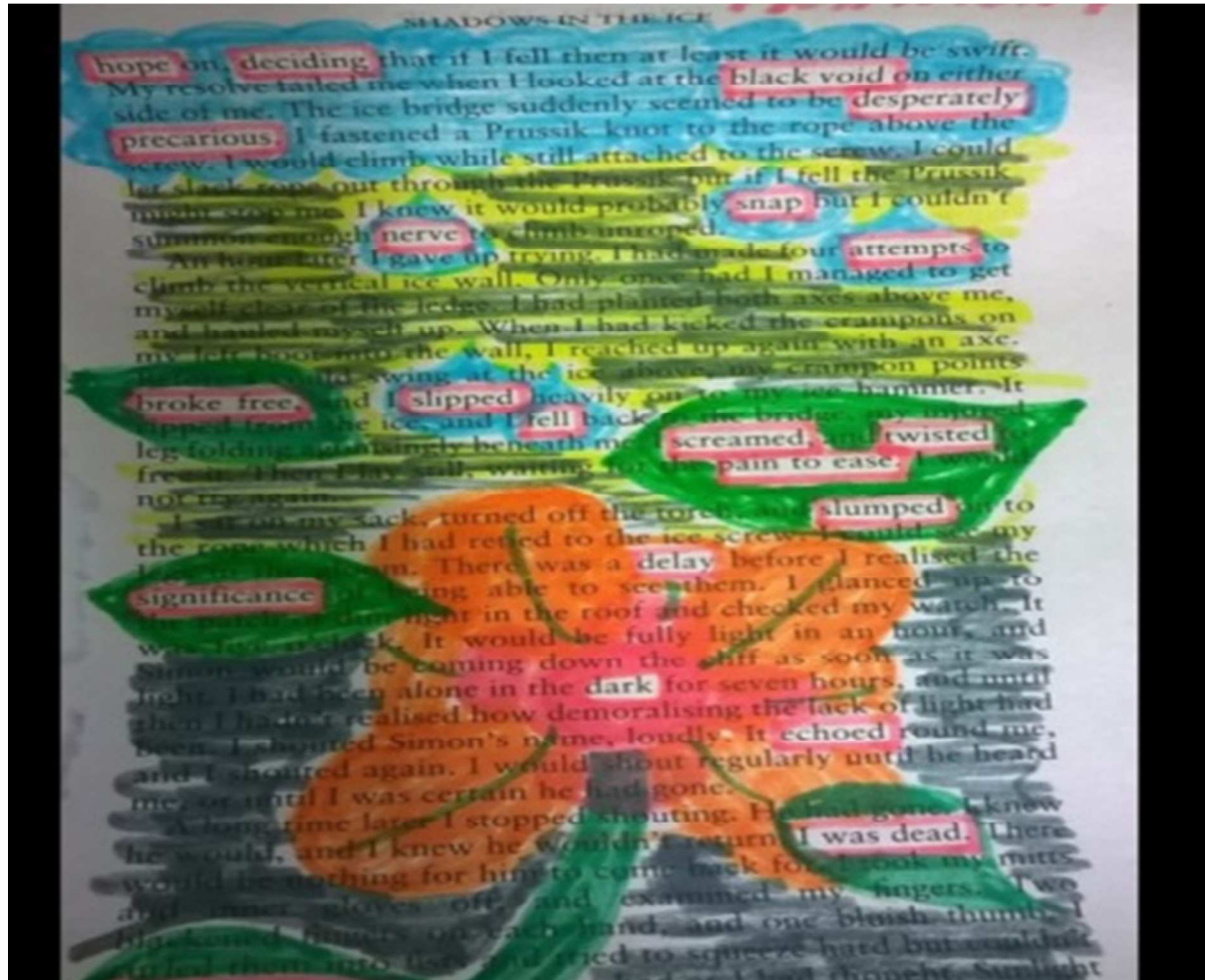
### 24 25 **Collaborative editing**

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28 Students were organised into groups of three and given a previous piece of  
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30 written work, with the grade boundaries shown. The challenge for the students  
31  
32 was to re-write the content and improve the grade and quality to a higher level. In  
33  
34 this case, the focus was very deliberately set on editing as the basis for improved  
35  
36 language control. Discussion with students resulted in a co-created editing  
37  
38 framework, based on: syntax clarity and varied lexis. Students' were instructed to  
39  
40 divide the piece into sections and re-write their own selected section, check the  
41  
42 editing of others writing, ensure fluency between the separate sections and  
43  
44 combine to one piece. At the end of the task, the groups nominated one member  
45  
46 to log-in and post the work for the rest of the class to read and grade accordingly,  
47  
48 giving feedback on the quality and where it could be improved even further.  
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53 Situating activity to the site in a blended approach developed confidence and  
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55 improved residence and promoted subsequent interaction to occur, overcoming  
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thresholds of apprehension while precipitating a re-consideration of the ways in which the network could support language modification.

### Artefact creation and network as exhibition



Aiming to sustain momentum and promote residence to the network, the next activity was based on language reconstruction from existing artefacts to create new multimodal texts. The course text (*Touching the Void* by Joe Simpson) was used with pages extracted from the book and students instructed to closely read the page distributed to them. Following this reading, students' selected specific words and phrases to capture mood through emotive language, with the resulting

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3 images photographed and posted to the network wall. In this instance a playful  
4 form of zooming-in and selection of lexis based on an identification of the text's  
5 themes reflects aspects implicit to language development in both writing, as  
6 constructed, and reading, as meaning-making. The resulting artefacts were posted  
7 to the network as an exhibition of remixed creation from existing texts. This visual  
8 form allows for a personalised literacy to emerge with diminished conscience  
9 about publishing the results, while rendering the network as a gallery.  
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### 19 **Open-publishing**

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22 The main network task was made to exploit the growing confidence of all  
23 members and build further community participation. Here the network serves  
24 principally as a publishing platform.  
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30 In this instance, students worked in the classroom on individual creative writing  
31 drills. These drills were sketches in words of portraits found and chosen online,  
32 from which they created descriptions. Guided instruction was available as support  
33 with a series of scaffolding prompts to a range of literary techniques to improve  
34 writing quality. Time was allocated for 'sketching' as practice in a slow meditation  
35 of the student's selected image that were developed into short narrative  
36 constructs. Short (2-500 word) sketches were revised by students with an editing  
37 checklist for to improve a first-attempt production (i.e. discourse markers,  
38 sentence length, punctuation range, etc.).  
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50 At the end of the session, students published their work to the network wall,  
51 along with their accompanying image. This action still resulted in some  
52 apprehension, with some students preferring to send the sketch in a direct  
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3 message to the teacher. Between sessions, encouraging comments were posted  
4  
5 by students eager to read one another's work and give positive feedback.  
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9 In subsequent lessons, the activity was repeated with selected landscape  
10  
11 sketches. Students who had previously posted their work privately as messages  
12  
13 posted openly, representing a momentum in confident network use.  
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16  
17 Reports from interviews of the impact of these interventions demonstrate a  
18  
19 change in disposition of language as a social instrument and a transformed  
20  
21 perspective of the network as an assistive technology, mediating performance of  
22  
23 renewed confidence. From Billy's quote that frames this paper (*"Don't go getting*  
24  
25 *at me about them words and tha'"*) to indicators of increased consideration of  
26  
27 form, for example when Martin posted and confided *"I spelt 'speech' wrong on*  
28  
29 *that post"* or Belinda reporting *"I think I might be getting the hang of it now"*.  
30  
31

### 32 **Vignette – Aniqah (25)**

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35 *Aniqah was a quiet student who described how her shyness had always led to her*  
36  
37 *not contributing or achieving academic qualifications. This exterior shyness*  
38  
39 *betrayed an intrinsic motivation and inner confidence that needed an outlet and*  
40  
41 *recognition. She participated in the course across two years, failing on the first*  
42  
43 *attempt and admitting that the reasons for it where her own lack of readiness at*  
44  
45 *returning to the classroom. When she came back in the second year, she was a*  
46  
47 *different person both in classrooms as well as online (in Edmodo) to how she had*  
48  
49 *been in the first year. Although she retained much of the same disposition in the*  
50  
51 *classroom as the previous year – quiet, unassuming and seemingly uncertain – a*  
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53 *determination arose and was given license where, in the subsequent year, she*  
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3 took a highly self-directed and proactive approach, acting as a digital mentor to  
4 the rest of the group when using Edmodo.  
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7  
8 In contrast to Mike who described the network as a 'safety net', she describes the  
9 network as a 'base' to orientate herself to her learning identity. Aniqah explained  
10 how she is a connected person, has a variety of different social media accounts  
11 and an iPad, but that she feels overwhelmed by notifications and e-mails in her  
12 life. She uses the word 'wasteful' to describe how social media notifications  
13 'waste' her attentions, so she has adjusted the settings accordingly. Yet she told  
14 how she kept the notification settings open on her Edmodo account, so she could  
15 receive alerts from the group in order to sustain a focus on study. The network  
16 appeared to facilitate this renewed determination and purpose. Analysis of posts  
17 showed an enhanced sense of agency through a variety of actions performed by  
18 Aniqah, from posting questions and resources to tips for other students. This self-  
19 regulation and proactivity appeared to transmit to her offline, classroom conduct  
20 as she exhibited vocal confidence and directed others. Far from the experience of  
21 repeating the course subduing her intent, in interviews Aniqah expressed a  
22 different attitude:  
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41 "This time I haven't been so afraid to use it. You know, I'm not so bothered about  
42 posting anything and it being wrong... I'm not going to be embarrassed about  
43 posting anything relating to the course"  
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48 The sense of overcoming affective thresholds is palpable in the comment and  
49 reflects a renewed confidence that supported her progress.  
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## 53 Findings

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3 There was a change in disposition shown in peripheral students perceptions of  
4 network, with open statements of resistance (*"I'm not joining that"*) followed by a  
5 changed view of the network once creative tasks had been situated to it (*"it was*  
6 *good to read over my classmates' thoughts and ideas when they did contribute"*).  
7  
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10  
11  
12 The network was described as a *"safety net"* and a *"base"*; classroom actions  
13 were enacted by students at a community level, e.g. a student who missed the  
14 lesson where students created profiles and set up accounts was supported by a  
15 peer outside of college to create a profile, telling the teacher that *"she needs to*  
16 *be there"* (i.e. registered to the network). In a more demonstrable example of re-  
17 engagement, the student community retained a student to the course who was  
18 experiencing domestic abuse and who had relocated, disrupting course  
19 attendance. For some weeks, it seemed the student had left the course, worried  
20 that she had fallen behind. The community used Edmodo to keep her updated  
21 and with continual reassurance and support and even used it to help her find safe  
22 accommodation before she became ready to re-join classroom sessions.  
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37 One student described how he had left school without English due to his peer  
38 group. While competent, he had gradually withdrawn from participation as school  
39 friends labelled him *"Professor Words"* whenever he answered questions.  
40 Gradually the nickname rendered him silent in the classroom as he feigned  
41 disinterest and 'failed' the qualification. The evening adult classes represented an  
42 opportunity to address that experience, while the network gave him a level of  
43 interaction previously unavailable to him. Initially, his interaction was strictly  
44 between himself and the teacher, but this was gradually superseded by self-and-  
45 community, following the posted samples of his work and critical support and  
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3 feedback provided. This gave him the opportunity to reciprocate in kind,  
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5 explaining what he had done in his work to his peers and giving encouragement.  
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## 8 **Conclusions**

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11 The network is presented as an arena for the performance of renewed  
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13 confidence, and the publishing gives the student a sense of authorship with the  
14  
15 community assuming the position of readership, creating a shift in identity that  
16  
17 reposition literacy as social and of their own capability, rather than accredited. It's  
18  
19 posited that the interaction between individual and network (as a tool) facilitates  
20  
21 a shift in student's self-perceptions of literacy ability. In the course of the study,  
22  
23 the presence of self in the network becomes assimilated to the practice of  
24  
25 processes towards objectives (*'momentum'*) and peripheral members are drawn  
26  
27 in through network operations to interlinked interactions with a community  
28  
29 becoming routine, so that conscious acts become unconscious ones (Kuutti,  
30  
31 1996). Transformation arises through a shift in habitus that enables a self-  
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33 perception of capability; manoeuvring through thresholds from the penumbra  
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35 towards a community core in ways that were once hypothetical, but have now  
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37 become operational.  
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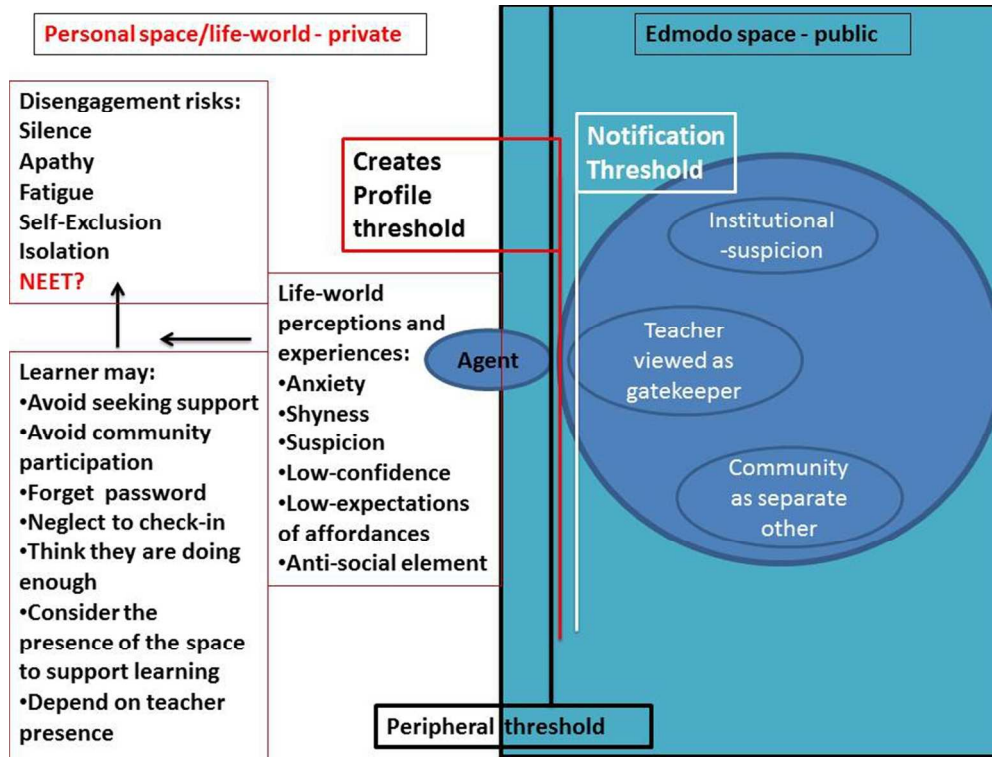
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Education + Training





Map of Disengagement experiences and indicators

254x190mm (96 x 96 DPI)

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