

# The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Learner: Cooperation, Collaboration and Caring in Online Learning

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## The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Learner: Cooperation, Collaboration and Caring in Online Learning

Learning with others provides many benefits. Among the more obvious of these are:

- motivation - others help to provide meaning, purpose and connection
- support and problem solving - a problem shared is a problem halved
- modelling thinking - seeing how different people understand similar problems helps us to better understand our own conceptions
- inspiration - others can excite, amuse, and delight us
- challenge - diverse perspectives mean we can never be complacent in our own beliefs
- reflection - having to express our conceptions to others helps us to understand them more clearly
- knowledge - the knowledge of many people is typically far greater than the knowledge of any individual among them, and this can be shared.
- creativity - diverse perspectives and the co-construction of knowledge mean that the adjacent possible is far larger than it is when we work alone.

Making effective use of all the benefits of social learning can, however, be challenging in a distance education setting. Technologies change how we communicate. Online learners always dwell in at least two places, physical and virtual, which changes the nature of engagement, for better or worse. Technologies enhance some aspects of communication and inhibit others. Tools break and, even if they don't, most require us to learn new skills to use them well. Simply transferring face-to-face pedagogies and methods to an online setting without taking into account the characteristics of the

# introductions



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Introducing me -

Philosophy degree, singer, geek, lecturer, self-organizing social learning PhD, toys, national teaching fellowship, Terry Anderson (sets, nets, groups, collectives and three generations of pedagogy), AU, Landing, MOOCS. Note special issues with AU and self-paced learning. Note Teaching Crowds book coming out in June.

Round robin - introduce yourself and the person prior to you in the sequence.

Describe why you are interested in this workshop.

10-15 mins

## Three generations of distance learning pedagogies

asocial	<b>Behaviourist/ Cognitive – <i>Self Paced, Individual Study</i></b>	Postal service, book publication, video, radio
eusocial	<b>Social constructivist – <i>Groups, classes</i></b>	Bulletin boards, Forums, LMSs, telephone
parasocial	<b>Connectivist – <i>Networks</i></b>	Social network systems, wikis, blogs, microblogs, read/write web, smartphone apps

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Introducing a framework for thinking about how social interaction occurs in distance learning.

Generations are not (exactly) about technology – more interesting is the pedagogical change that technology affordances have brought.

Tomorrow I will argue that pedagogies are technologies and, like all technologies, the rate of change is increasing. Are we entering a fourth generation? I think so. We are moving beyond simplistic network models to those incorporating other social forms and, as significantly, emergent features and systems to exploit emergence, such as learning analytics, collectives etc.

Note that each generation encompasses the last

eusocial – highest social form, involves division of social roles, individuals acting for good of the group rather than personal gain

parasocial – intimacy at a distance, often involving little or no real intimacy – one individual acts as though they are involved in a typical social relationship

Anderson, T., & Dron, J. (2011). Three generations of distance education pedagogy. *International Review of Research on Distance and Open Learning*, 12(3), 80–97



we shape our dwellings and  
afterwards our dwellings  
shape us

First activity for today is to think about how mediation and technology affect social learning

**ssshhh....**  
introducing  
the sticky-note  
forum



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let's play - the sticky note forum game

present a controversial belief about distance learning - ideally one you believe in yourself

Comment on what others are posting.

Do not talk. Try not to exchange glances. Try to concentrate on just the sticky notes.

That's all I will say on the subject - the rest you have to work out for yourselves.

15 mins

Note this is supposed to encourage thinking about how distance technologies change things. Need to give some people smaller notes than others.

# What did we learn?

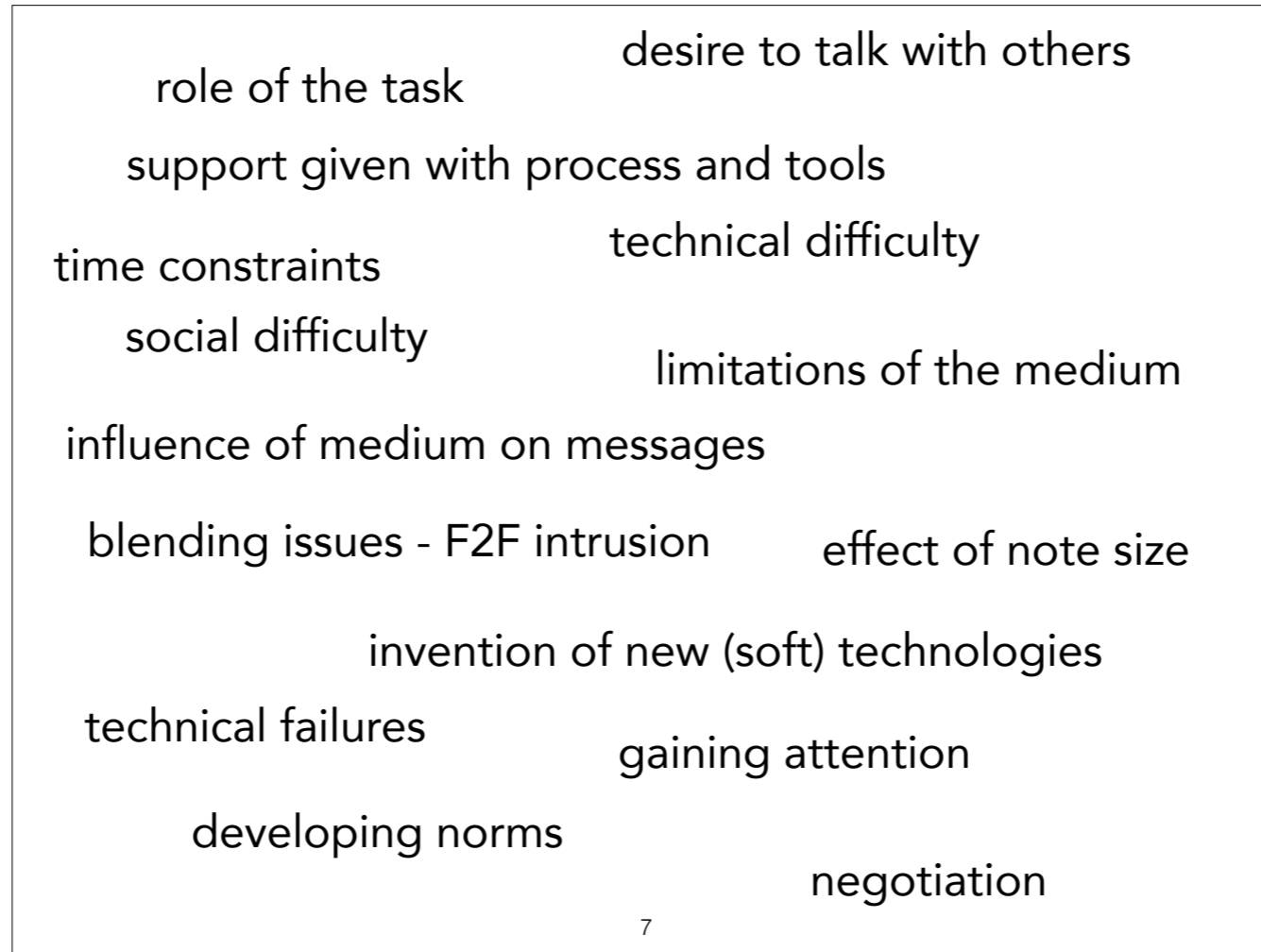
6

How was that activity? What changed? What was difficult? Why?

Discuss mediating role of technology

Issues of synchronicity, effects of others on behaviour, effects of tools on behaviour, issues with note size, clashes evolving norms

What kind of support would have helped to make it easier?



Some thoughts on issues with the sticky note forum.

Note how the blended context changed things. Observe the fuzzy nature of the task. Sequence matters. Technical difficulties ensue. Note size like bandwidth (and time?)

how would you assess  
this?

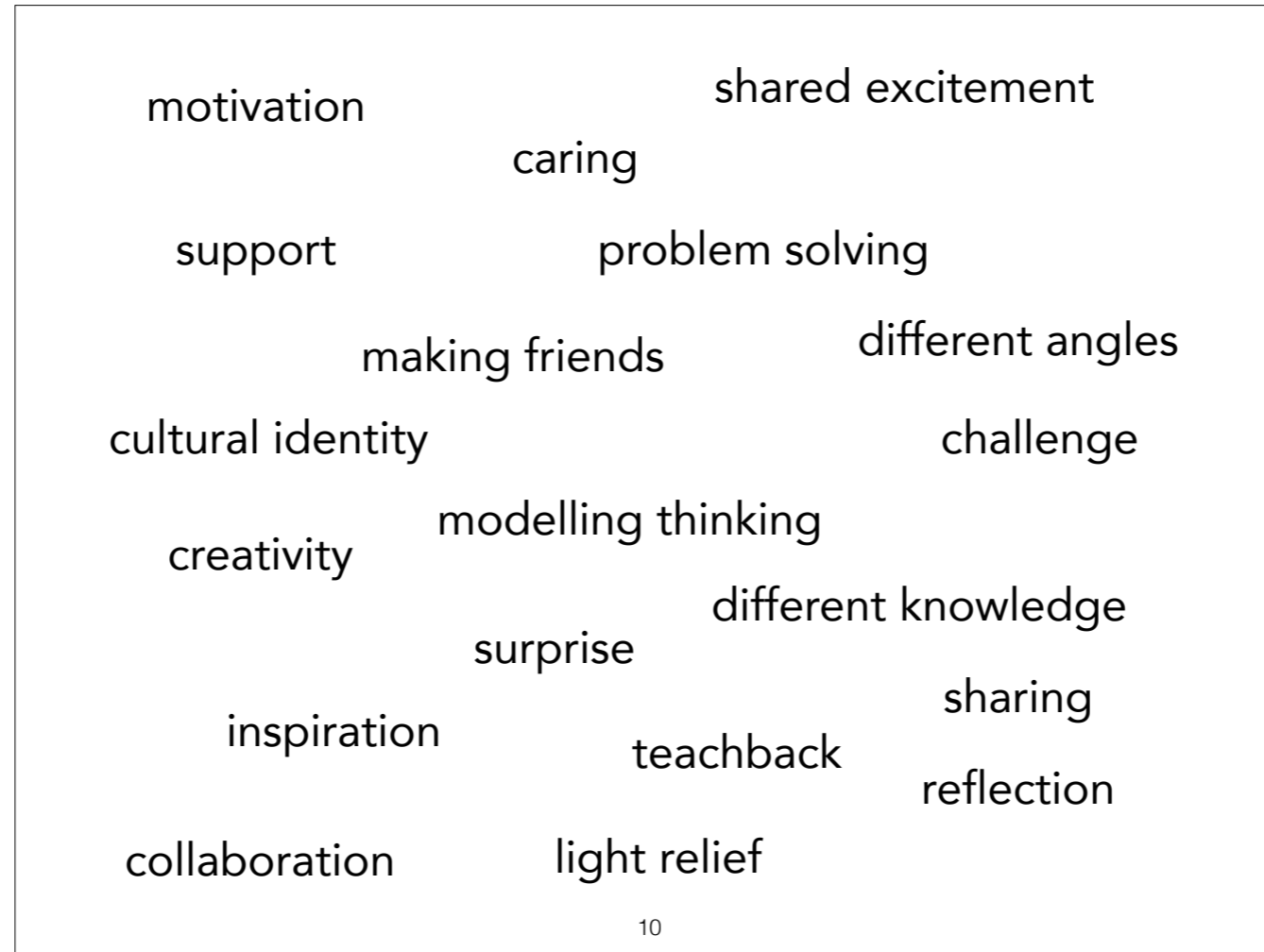
final discussion of sticky notes - 5-10 mins. Issues of assessing directly relating back to issues with medium. Questions of what to assess and why. Issues of process vs product.



# Why social?

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Small group activity - brainstorm benefits of learning with other people (notably other learners but of course including other teachers) 10 minutes



Some of the benefits of learning with other people

- motivation - others help to provide meaning, purpose and connection
- support and problem solving - a problem shared is a problem halved
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alone.

# Why not social?

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Another small group (or maybe plenary) discussion and brainstorm 10 minutes

evil people                      lack of skill    groupthink  
   fear of exposure  
                               unpredictability  
 power hierarchies                      inequalities  
   effort  
   technical complexity  
                               culture  
   fear of disclosure  
                               cost  
 shyness                                      embarrassment  
   efficiency  
                               constraints on pace                      stupid people  
 fairness                                      boors (and bores)

Social is not one thing

presentation part follows - should last about 30 mins

# A typology of social forms

- **The group**  
Hierarchies, membership, intentionality, collaboration, boundaries
- **The net**  
Personal connections, fuzzy boundaries, emergence
- **The set**  
Publication, aggregation, anonymity, cooperation
- **The collective**  
Computational agents, algorithms, analytics, visualization, crowd wisdom/mob stupidity

why useful? Because we know a lot about groups. We know much less about learning in other forms that are amplified by the internet, and they are incredibly useful, ubiquitous and of potential value in formal education as well as lifelong learning.

# First there were groups...



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groups, classes, teams, cohorts, schools, faculties, universities, colleges, etc:

hierarchical organization

norms and rules

rites of joining and leaving

exclusion as important as inclusion

purpose

methods and structure

social bonding

fundamental human form of social engagement

Social constructivism, Vygotsky, Dewey, etc.

Erik de Graaf says people are not born to work in a team - he is wrong. We totally are. But we have to learn to work in any particular team because all teams (groups) have different rules, norms and purposes.

pre-planned learning

collaborating on tasks

motivation

**Groups are good  
for...**

reducing loneliness

trust

social capital

caring

developing networks



scalability

diverse viewpoints

groupthink

## **Group weaknesses**

limits on learner control

power structures

efficiency



group tools

# ...and networks



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Notably touted by Barry Wellman and followers. Networked individualism. Individual focus. Not top down. Emergent structures visible. Every person's network different. People who help you to learn - not a designed process. Siemens Connectivism, Downes.

lifelong learning serendipity

finding answers motivation

## **Nets are good for...**

scalability learner control

reducing loneliness adaptation

social capital inspiration

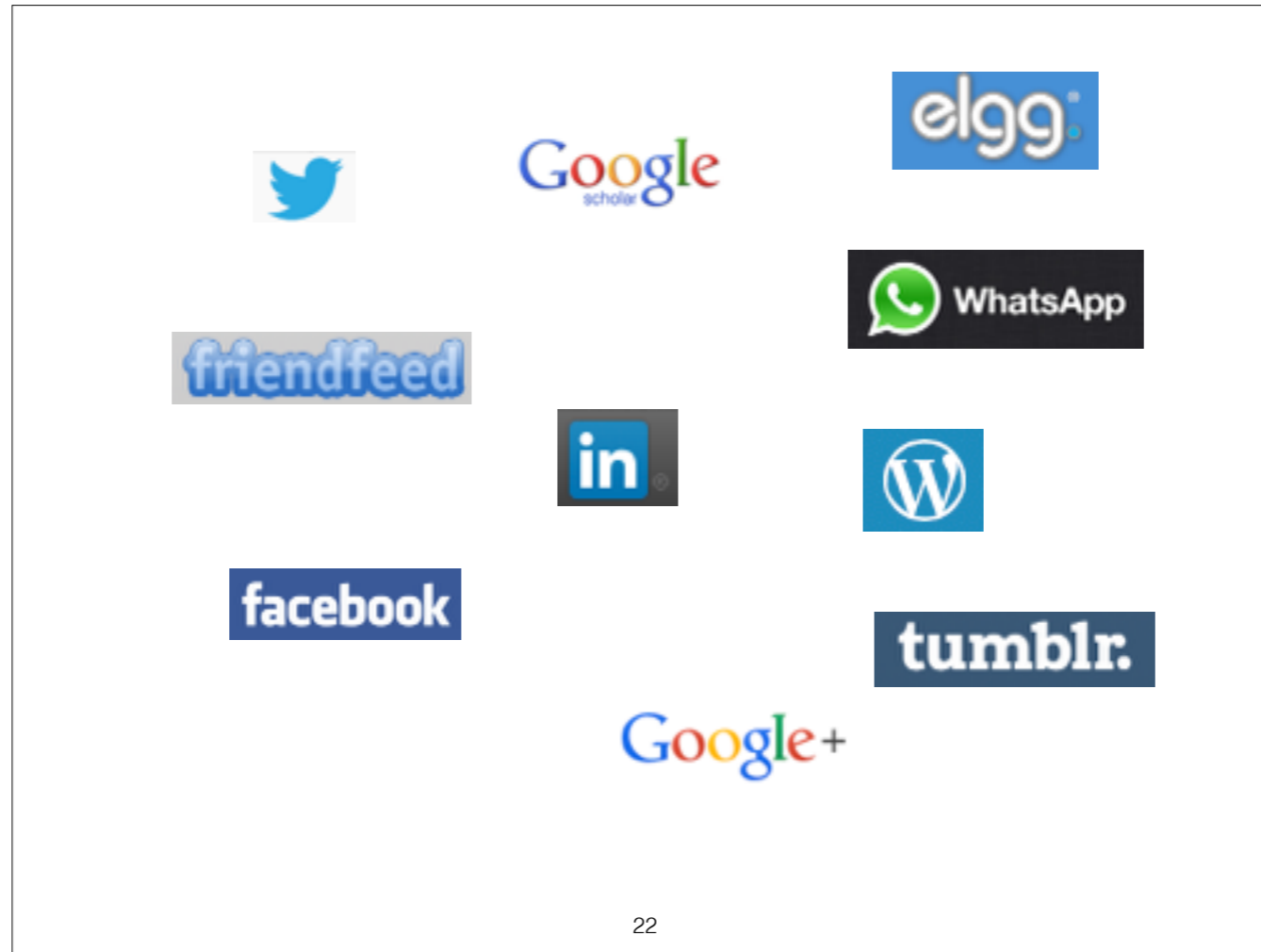
lack of process  
lack of direction inefficient paths

preferential attachment

## **Network weaknesses**

connection matters more than  
wisdom

lack of structure  
echo chambers



These are predominantly network-oriented but most have group and set features too (notably Twitter, Elgg, Wordpress)

There were always sets...



...but we didn't pay much  
attention to them

Just people with common attributes in shared space - no network connections, no group processes or cohesion or shared endeavour.

discovery serendipity  
finding answers anonymity  
exploring topics finding people

## **Sets are good for...**

reducing loneliness learner control  
diverse perspectives scalability  
starting groups and networks



bad people

stupid people

anonymity

lack of process

## **Set weaknesses**

reliability

lack of caring

lack of structure

weak social ties

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set + network + rules/norms/etc = group?

flaming, griefing, trolling



These are some predominant set-based tools (or that have a significant set-orientation). Note that most also have more or less strong network features and some even support groups.

# collectives

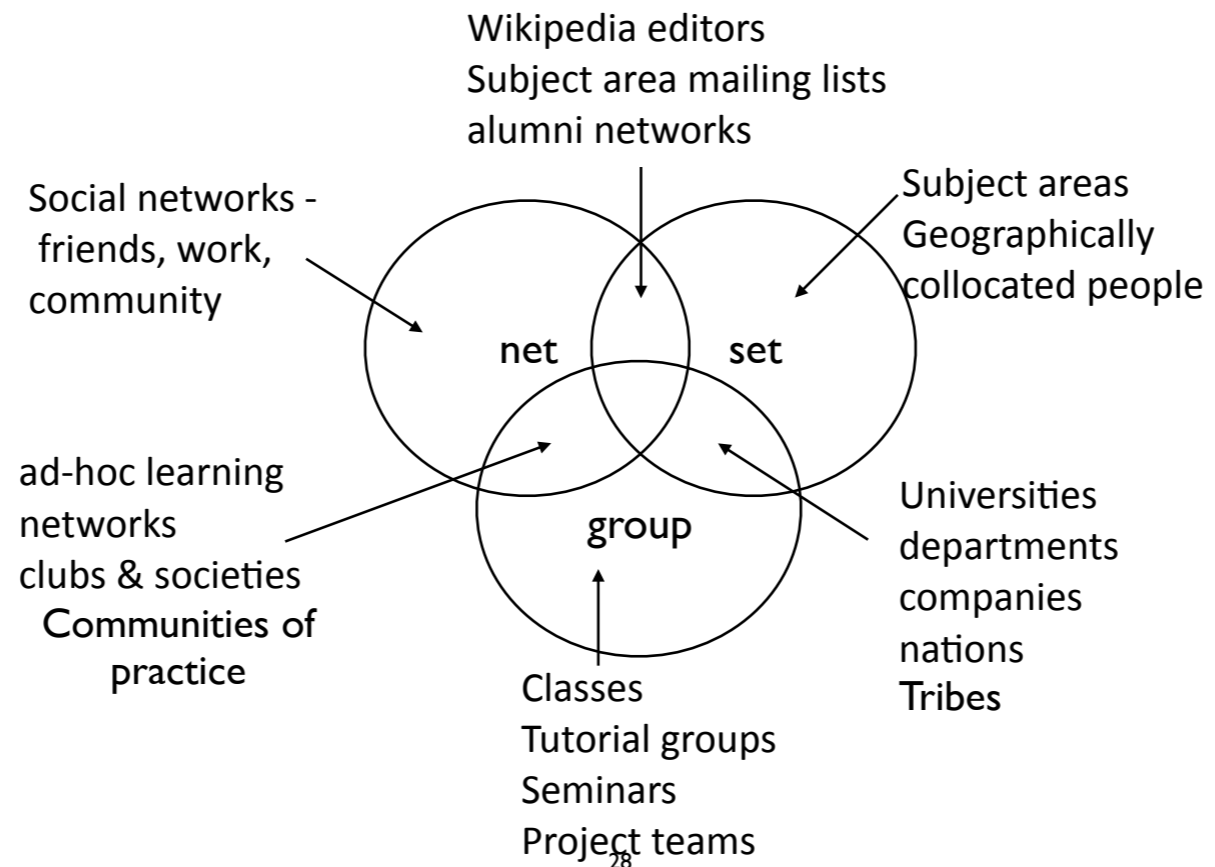
The image is a composite illustrating the process of collective intelligence. It features a search engine results page for "stigmergy", a central diagram with three interconnected circles labeled "capture", "processing", and "presentation", and a bar chart showing citation trends from 2010 to 2013. The search results include a Wikipedia entry and a journal article. The bar chart shows a steady increase in citations over the four-year period.

Year	Total citations
2010	~10
2011	~25
2012	~45
2013	~65

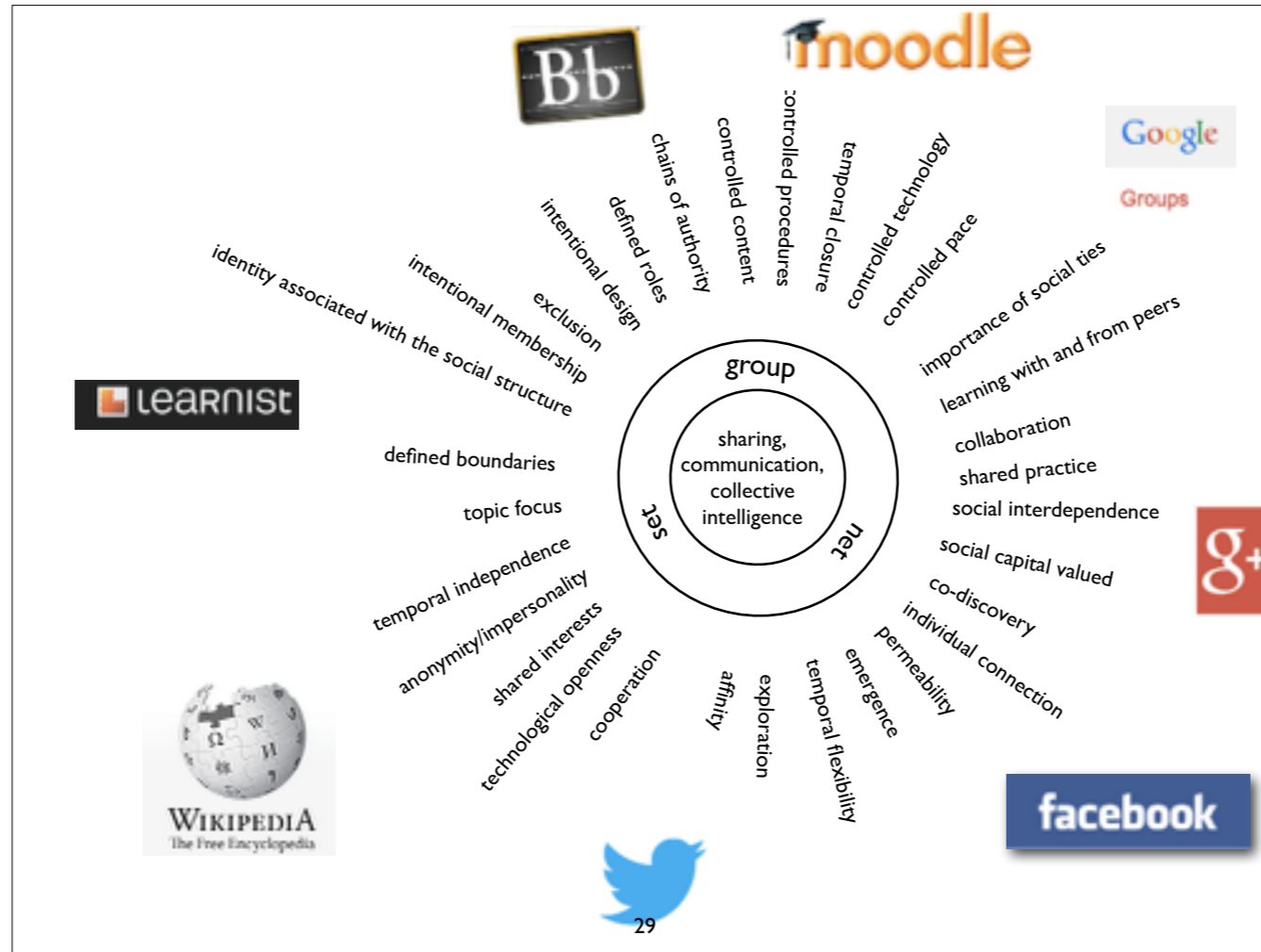
many to one communication. algorithms combining actions of individuals to recommend, discover, suggest, critique, Can replace some of the roles of a teacher, provide reliability, trust, coordination, structure.

But collective stupidity is as likely as collective intelligence. The algorithm is all-important. Crowd wisdom has to be applied wisely. Tricky in a learning context where needs vary greatly from one context to the next.

## Blends and combinations



Not binary categories - more like primary colours that are usually blended



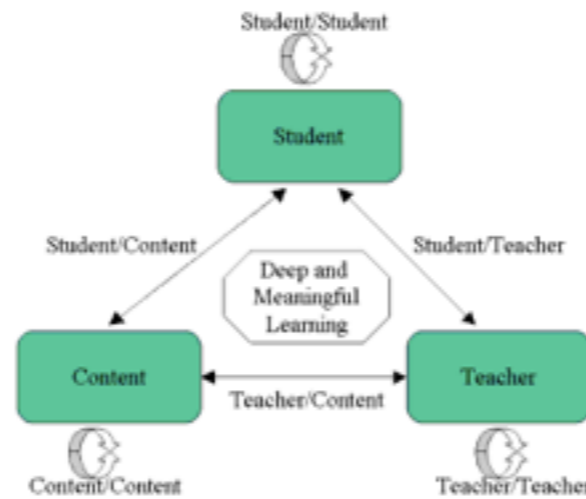
a blend – groups nets and sets are primary colours that can be mixed and that blend and blur. all groups are both sets and nets too. All nets are sets. Some mixes are easily recognized. CoPs live between groups and nets. Tribes are group-like sets. Religious organizations are set-like groups. What is the Landing?

# Other considerations

A brief intro to some other theoretical ideas that are relevant

# Interaction equivalency

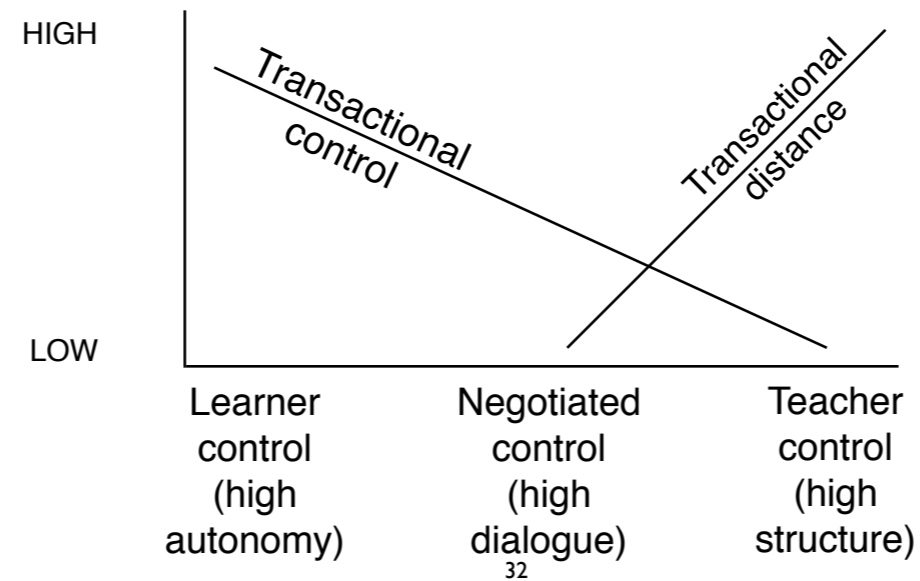
(Terry Anderson)



<http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/149/230>

Higher levels of one kind of interaction can compensate for lower levels of others  
No big surprise - because content and students are teachers too

# transactional distance and control



Note the inverse relationship. The more structured the learning transaction – i.e. the more the teacher controls the content – the less the opportunities are for dialogue and the less control the learner has. Note that what we imagine students are doing when we tell them to do something bears little resemblance to what they actually do (Haughey and Kearsley)



# soft vs hard



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piano vs pianola

orchestration by human vs orchestration embedded

a perspective on the nature of technologies and our roles in both interacting with them and being a part of them

precision  
replicability  
accuracy  
speed  
ease of use

hard is easy  
soft is hard

resilience  
flexibility  
diversity  
creativity  
control

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when the orchestration is in the technology it relieves us of the need to make an effort. That's good, as long as the technologies do what we want. We have to perform the orchestration of soft technologies, which is difficult. We have to constantly invent how to use them, to adapt, to create. That's hard (difficult)

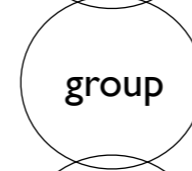
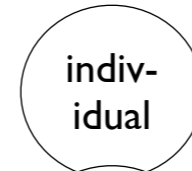
Social technologies are inherently soft and, as we give learners greater flexibility and greater control, become ever softer.

Move from instructivist to constructivist to connectivist

# Back to the generations of distance learning pedagogies

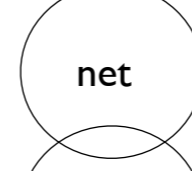
Private

1. **Behaviourist/ Cognitive** – *Self Paced, Individual Study,*

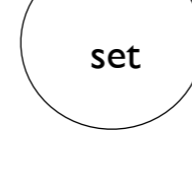


Public

2. **Social constructivist** – *Groups, classes*



3. **Connectivist** – *Networks*



hard

soft

Impersonal Caring Sharing

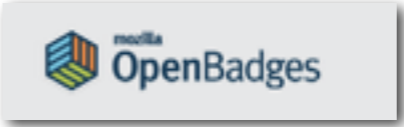
# Making social happen: Your ideas, your problems, your solutions

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Issues of constructive alignment - ask the group what they do, what works.

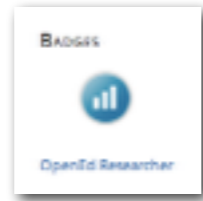
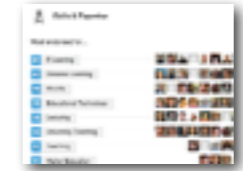
Discuss issues arising. Likely to be some that want to assess social activity. Lead on to next slide. 10-15 mins

Issues of motivation



How/whether to assess collaborative activities

How/whether to reward cooperation



# Assessment

(or 'evaluation' if you prefer)



Issues of sequence  
and priority

How to deal with people who  
don't want or need to be  
sociable.

Collusion and  
collaboration

Special issues with assessment of a) social activities and b) flexible, soft activities.

How to assess collaborative activities. Issues of motivation. Issues of priority - first past post finding it easier. How to reward cooperation. How to deal with people who don't want or need to be sociable. 10-15 mins

# Menu of options

- Take an existing teaching activity, course, module and reinvent it using a different social form.
- Identify a failed social learning situation you are familiar with. Fix it.
- Devise a fair assessment for a social learning activity.
- Identify a learning activity that is almost never done socially. Make it social.

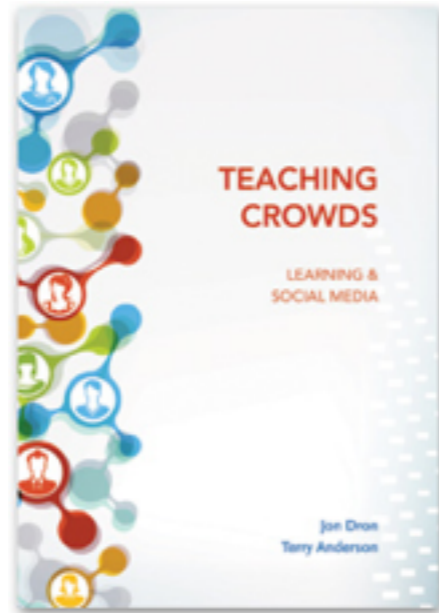
If there is time left, small group activities. 20 mins

# Action planning

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plenary, ask for what people will take away, how they may change their own practice, what they will tell other people. 10-15 mins

Coming soon (June 2014)....  
***Teaching Crowds: Learning and Social Media***  
<http://www.aupress.ca/index.php/books/120235>



# Thank you

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@jondron on almost everything