Connecting Scholarship in the Open: A Scoping Review of Academic Researcher Personal Learning Support Structures

Jeffrey M. Keefer

New York University, jk904@nyu.edu

Abstract

Social media and public engagement play an increasing role in how people across ages, disciplines, and interests communicate with each other and perform their own lives. While different audiences participate for a diverse of reasons, researchers increasingly explore how connections are made, remain, and shift, along with the whats and whys these occur, especially within personal learning networks or environments related to academic learning (Buchem, Attwell, & Torres, 2011; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Kop, 2011; Rahimi, Berg, & Veen, 2014; Veletsianos, 2012). Social media commonly promotes public conversationality, with personal learning networks and connected communities utilized by developing researchers while engaging in their learning and inquiries. While researcher development is a growing speciality within higher education academic discourse (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009; McAlpine, Horn, & Rath, 2011; Wisker et al., 2010; Wisker, Robinson, Trafford, Lilly, & Warnes, 2004), little is known about researcher support structures of those engaging in research in public.

With social media and networking technologies constantly shifting how people use, learn from, and make meaning through them, a scoping study is a useful methodology to explore this topic. Scoping studies examine the range and nature of an area of research, help determine the value of undergoing a full systematic review, summarize findings of previous studies, and serve to identify gaps in the literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Paré, Trudel, Jaana, & Kitsiou, 2015). While there are numerous kinds of literature reviews, scoping studies are particularly useful when a rapid overview of the literature is needed to broadly map what is currently known about an area (Pham et al., 2014), especially one that is not directly linked to specific disciplinary communities or functions where an established coherent portion of literature exists.

The question guiding this study is: How do developing researchers learn in networked public spaces? The findings of this research work in progress will be presented during the Pecha Kucha.

Keywords

Researcher Development, Personal Learning Network, Academic Identity, Doctoral Identity, Connected Learning

Research Context

Social media and public engagement play an increasing role in how people across ages, disciplines, and interests communicate with each other and perform their own lives. While different audiences participate for a variety of reasons, researchers increasingly explore how connections are made, remain, and shift, along with the whats and whys these occur, especially within personal learning networks or environments related to academic learning (Buchem, Attwell, & Torres, 2011; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Kop, 2011; Rahimi, Berg, & Veen, 2014; Veletsianos, 2012). While researcher development is a growing speciality within higher education academic discourse (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009; McAlpine, Horn, & Rath, 2011; Wisker et al., 2010; Wisker, Robinson, Trafford, Lilly, & Warnes, 2004), less is known about public support structures researchers use while engaging in their studies.

Aims and Objectives

This study explores the growing phenomena of a public presence of (developing) researchers who talk about, discuss, or interact with others about research in progress or under development. Older conceptualisations of research often precluded discussing it while the research was in progress, yet newer models of connected or networked scholarship increasingly involves a value in publicly using one's personal learning network as a support structure during one's scholarly pursuits. Much is known about smaller, closed communities, especially regarding researcher development and supervisory supports during one's doctoral research studies, though less is known about how connected and networked structures continue to support researcher development in a public space, regardless of the concerns that some have for research ideas being stolen, lifted, or permanently borrowed.

Design

The question guiding this study is: How do developing researchers learn in networked public spaces? As a scoping study, the literature was initially reviewed to better understand the topic and seek to understand what evidence already exists in this area. This scoping study reviewed the literature based on the following terms—personal learning networks, researcher development (and network), professional identity, academic identity (and researcher and network), researcher and "community of practice," doctoral and "community of practice," "community of practice" and PhD, open learning and researcher, networked learning and researcher, "networked learning" and PhD, and public support structures. 155 articles were identified as related to this study's research question, and the articles are being analysed for thematic clarity and guidance. While study is currently in the write-up stage, it is expected that additional, related areas in the literature surface and will be retrieved and integrated into the final work before being presented at the conference.

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