

Student Teachers' Learning Online: the POD Model (Professional Online District)

Characteristics of the Professional Online District (POD)

1. Learning and learner centered

Learners engaging in online tasks constitute the *work* of a CoP which is built around a shared *Domain* (Subject and Teaching, and Citizenship of the POD itself) in a Community, which binds learners together, around their professional Practice as teachers. This work creates the curriculum of the POD:

- Written reflections
- Messages in the Coffee Bar
- Resource library

Assessment takes place through the metareflective Elearning Profile*.

2. Technologically enabled

Technology is:

- NOT a barrier – it is 'invisible'
- Reliable
- Updated regularly to maintain credibility and sophisticated functionality
- Offers the potential to use a range of **tools** including, for example, Video Diaries, Wikis, Podcasts, and Blogs and **locations**, for example, WebCT or a social networking site such as Facebook.
- Developed with advice from POD members.

3. Permeable

Links across POD Boundaries are made (and maintained) to and from:

- Other subjects, phases, cohorts
- Schools or other establishments
- Guest 'Experts'

4. Alive

Liveliness is maintained by:

- A mixture of familiar and exciting activities
- Reflection and redesign

Domain: Students contribute to, and learn from, discussions around the uniqueness of their community through some of their reflections on their teaching experiences, *and* through informal sharing around these experiences, *and* by sharing resources that support teaching Geography.

Community: built through sharing their reflections, for example, students may give others courage to discuss their practice more candidly. Through sharing resources, they create structural scaffolds for the community which is also built in the informal contacts in the online 'coffee bars'

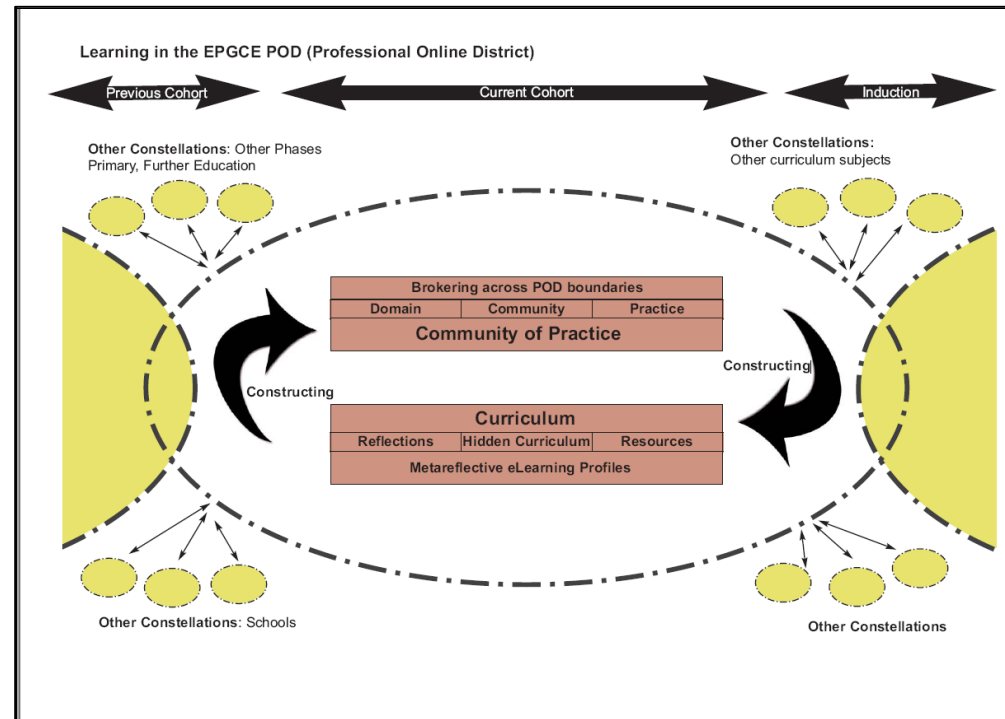
Practice: built by and through both formal and informal sharing of resources in the online libraries and in the Coffee Bars. The practice is also built through reflections, for example, those on students' use of particular teaching strategies.

Brokering across POD boundaries: links to and from other CoPs:

The diagram shows that the POD has permeable boundaries permitting living learning links to and from other *constellations* (Wenger, 1998: 126) of CoPs. The diagram identifies four key types of cross-boundary links:

- members of other UU PGCE Geography cohorts
- schools
- other phases/subjects, and
- others.

This is a significant feature of the POD, because the online environment (which can be accessible from anywhere at any time) allows the flexibility to make and share learning links throughout the education community.



Reflections

Students are asked to write or video-record their reflections on some aspect of teaching practice on a weekly basis.

Hidden Curriculum

There is evidence of 'hidden curriculum' in the informal, non-compulsory 'coffee bar' discussions.

Resources

Students share resources (lesson plans, worksheets, good ideas) to support teaching and learning.

*The Metareflective Elearning Profile

The students are asked to reflect on all of their contributions online, considering, in particular, what they learned online and how they may have helped others to learn online.

Areas for Current and Future Research

Using Digital Video to Transform Learning in Initial Teacher Education – project funded by the Standing Council for Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS, with O'Hara DCU, Conway, UUC and Austin, UU).

The Albedo Scale of Professional Reflexivity – HEIF funding to do a small pilot project to develop and exemplify a multi-point scale based on written and video diary reflections.

I would also like to research the following:

Assessing online learning: the effectiveness of the metareflective Elearning Profile.

Investigating the wider applicability of the POD Model in other areas of professional education e.g., midwifery, medicine, social work. Developing an interdisciplinary bid to ESRC (Small Grants).