



a place of mind

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## **Rhizo 15 Research Study Information**

### ***Threshold Concepts in Connectivist MOOCs: A Phenomenological Exploration***

The information below outlines a research study being conducted as a component of the requirements for the degree of PhD in the form of a dissertation, which is a public document. This document explains how the study will be conducted, describes what participation entails, and explains the types of data that will be collected. It discusses your rights as a participant, shares information on who to contact if you have concerns or queries, and provides clear instructions on how you may 'opt out' of any or all aspects of the study. More detailed information on the study is available at the research website: <http://www.ashleygshaw.com/rhizo15-research-project>

#### **STUDY TEAM**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Don Krug  
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#### **PURPOSE**

This research seeks to gain an understanding of the experiences of participants in rhizo15. As a type of informal, self-directed learning experience very different from traditional schooling, MOOCs like rhizo15 place high demands on participants' technical skills and learning abilities. By sharing your experience, you may help us better understand the nature of these demands and the ways that different participants successfully navigate them. The goal of this study is to identify *threshold concepts*, the types of knowledge and skills necessary for successful participation in this type of learning environment. It is hoped that the findings of this study may offer practical contributions around design, pedagogy, and practices for similar online courses in the future.

#### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

There are three components of this study, described below.

### **A. Observation of rhizo15 Course Spaces**

Throughout the course, the researcher will be observing the online spaces related to rhizo15. This includes the Peer 2 Peer U (P2PU) course website, Facebook group, tweets using the #rhizo15 hashtag, Google group, hangouts, and any other spaces that may be used as part of rhizo15. You will not be asked to do anything other than what you would regularly do as part of the course; I will simply be reading postings, viewing media, and making notes related to the questions and aims of the research. No identifying information (names or usernames) will be recorded. If you wish to opt-out of these observations (meaning nothing related to your participation in rhizo15 will be observed or recorded) details on how to do so are provided below.

### **B. Pre and Post Course Questionnaires**

A link to a pre-course questionnaire and a post-course questionnaire, hosted on the FluidSurveys website, will be sent to everyone registered in rhizo15 and posted in the online course spaces. More detailed information on this component of the study will preface each questionnaire and your consent to participation will be requested. Both pre and post-course questionnaires will ask questions regarding your participation in rhizo15, your use of various technologies, and your approach to learning online. Each questionnaire should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

### **C. Interviews and In-depth Data Collection**

On the pre-course questionnaire, and through postings on the online course spaces, you will be asked if you would be willing to take part in a more in-depth component of this study. Detailed information on this component of the study, including a request for your consent to participation, will be provided to anyone indicating interest. If you agree, your participation and experiences in rhizo15 will be explored in two ways.

Throughout the course, any data you post to the online course spaces, or related to the course, will be collected. This might include posts to the P2PU course website, or to the Facebook or Google groups, tweets using the #rhizo15 hashtag, posts to your own blog about rhizo15, or comments on the blog posts of others in the course. You will be asked to provide a list of any online spaces you use as part of rhizo15 and the names or usernames you use for each, but apart from this, data collection will not require any extra time or effort beyond what you would regularly do as part of the course. The researcher will aggregate your data into a single electronic file, which will be shared with you at the end of the course (or at any point you wish along the way).

After the course has ended, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview where you will be invited to share your experiences as a participant in rhizo15 and to discuss the way you approach learning online. You may be asked questions relating to your data that has been collected during the course. The interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes, will be conducted using Skype (or a similar voice over internet service), and will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. If you wish to view the transcript for accuracy you will be invited to do so.

## **STUDY RESULTS**

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate dissertation, which is a public document, and may also be published in journal articles and books. As well, you may request a copy of the final paper in person, by phone, or by email using contact details provided below.

## **POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY**

It is unlikely there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you, and the topic of the study should not require you to share any sensitive or personal information. You do not have to answer any questions or share any information that you do not want to. However, it is possible that on the questionnaire or during an interview you may be asked questions that could make you feel uncomfortable or may bring up unpleasant memories. At any stage of the study, please let the researcher know if you have concerns or experience any distress. We are able to provide referral to counseling if requested; similar support is also likely available through well-being programs in your workplace, educational institution, or community.

## **POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

There are some possible benefits to you as a participant in the study. You will be given the opportunity to reflect on your learning in rhizo15. This may help you better understand how you learn and could help you develop more effective approaches to learning in the future. Further, you will be asked about a variety of different technologies and types of learning experiences. It is possible through this you may become aware of potentially useful resources you have not previously been exposed to.

Others may also benefit from this study. We hope that by identifying the knowledge and skills necessary for successful participation in this type of course, and by understanding some of the challenges participants face, our study may contribute to the design of similar courses in the future.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your confidentiality will be respected throughout the study. Methods used to ensure your identity and personal information are protected include:

- Data collected through observations will not have any personal identification (names, usernames) attached.
- Any identifying information provided on questionnaires (i.e. email addresses) will be replaced by coded identifiers, and data from all questionnaires will be aggregated before analysis.
- In publications, participants will be identified by pseudonyms and descriptions will be altered or removed as necessary to protect confidentiality. However, we acknowledge that despite these measures, due to the nature of data collected from online sources, it may still be possible to trace the identity of participants. Before any data in which your identity could possibly be evident is shared (such as direct quotations from online sources, screen shots, etc.), we will contact you to obtain your explicit consent to the publication of such data.
- Throughout the study, digital data will be stored on the researchers' password protected

computer, with backups stored on a password-protected drive. At the end of the study, this data will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected drive for five years and then destroyed.

- Any electronic documents, such as copies of emails, will be saved in password-protected accounts only and confidential information will not be collected or exchanged via email.
- Any hard copy data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at UBC for 5 years and subsequently destroyed.
- Only the members of the research team will have access to any of the data.

### **CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY**

This research is being conducted by Ashley Shaw, as part of the requirements for the PhD degree, under the supervision of Dr. Don Krug. If you have any questions or would like further information with respect to this study, please contact any member of the research team; names and contact details are listed on the first page of this document.

### **CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line at the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598 or if long distance email [RSIL@ors.ubc.ca](mailto:RSIL@ors.ubc.ca) or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT**

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative outcomes. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any point, all data pertaining to your participation will be destroyed.

**If you wish to opt-out of the observation component of this study**, please contact the co-investigator, Ashley Shaw, at [rhizo15research@gmail.com](mailto:rhizo15research@gmail.com). You do not need to give any reason for your decision or provide any details, but it would be helpful if you could include the names you use on the various course related sites (i.e. the name you go by on Facebook, your Twitter 'handle', your username on P2PU forums) so that we can be sure to fully respect your request.