Dissertation

The Use of Digital Technologies to Address Troublesome Knowledge Arising from Faiths Engagement in the Areas of Identity, Practice and Community

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Abstract

In theory, digital technologies offer great potential to inspire intergroup understanding but in practice they can tend instead to create homogenous communities of like-minded people. This case study of a faiths awareness training programme that prepares participants to engage in dialogue with practitioners of different faiths is used to consider the question of how digital technologies can be involved in shaping learner attitudes when they encounter troublesome knowledge (Perkins, 2006), in this case, around faiths engagement, which has potential to lead to cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962).

The study is framed by applying Wenger's (2009) three dimensions relating to identity, practice and community within a learning community. It firstly considers how encountering potentially unfamiliar approaches to faiths engagement can create troublesome knowledge for learners that can challenge their identity, and how digital technologies can enable this to be scaffolded in stages, enabling potential dissonance to be managed. The practice of faiths engagement is then considered, and how digital technologies can enable participants to learn from fellow members with 'lived experience' of this and imagine how to incorporate learning from it into their own practice. Finally, the role of community is considered, and how digital technologies can enable those that encounter troublesome knowledge to continue to learn from the community while adopting an approach of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), observing how experienced participants approach faiths engagement.

Interviews are conducted with five participants who have undertaken digital training designed to prepare them for face-to-face interactions with faith practitioners, asking them to compare that training with experiences observed of learning on social media. Interview findings show that digital training can facilitate scaffolded learning to positively prepare participants for potentially dissonant experiences, but that learning online from fellow participants is difficult due to perceptions around trust in shared experiences within digital media, although with potential to learn from legitimate peripheral participation if experiences can be authenticated.

Since interview participants were not selected to represent any wider population, findings are used to form theoretical propositions rather than categorical truths, so creating possibilities to test these further in future.

1 Introduction

1.1 Reasons for Training

Integration of faiths and cultures into secular life is one of the most significant issues facing society in Britain today (Casey, 2016). This study involves one approach to addressing this issue in the multifaith setting of Southall in London, somewhere that has been held as an example of where such integration has successfully occurred (e.g. Tabeling, 2005). It considers the role of a training programme for groups wanting to learn how to better understand and engage with different faiths and cultures, provided by the Kings Centre, for whom I work. The programme is designed to build confidence and skills in participants to engage in dialogue with faith practitioners through raising awareness of faiths from a cultural perspective. The training therefore raises awareness that everyone sees the world through their own cultural lenses, including the participants, and lets them begin to work out what that means for interacting with different others. As Storti (1998) says:

> [T]he behavior of people from another culture may seem strange to you, but it probably makes sense to them, and vice versa. The reason any behavior makes sense is simply because it is consistent with what a given person believes in or holds dear. (p.13)
>
> Once you accept that people behave the way they do for a reason, whatever you may think of that reason, you can go beyond simply reacting to that behavior and figure out how to work with it. (p.5)

The dialogue approach preferred in this programme focuses on finding and understanding common ground between groups, in contrast to other approaches of debate, which highlights intergroup differences, and discussion, which aims to negotiate these differences (Nagda et al., 2008). These other approaches can in practice, lead to avoidance of interaction altogether (Abu-Nimer, 2001) whereas awareness of how to engage in dialogue can unlock its possibility for participants. Feedback indicates though that learning of this approach can create troublesome knowledge (Perkins, 2006) for some, knowledge that challenges their preconceptions, in this case, how to interact with different faiths.

This training is of great importance in British society because while it is unquestionably multicultural, it is not necessarily intercultural. Cultures can coexist tolerantly yet effectively function in isolated communities, with no real interaction occurring (Casey, 2016). If faiths and cultures are only observed superficially, then negative media portrayals or unexamined inherited perspectives can easily shape attitudes, potentially exacerbating pre-existing anxieties that deter or even eliminate meaningful contact altogether (Plant and Devine, 2003). If contact does occur, then people can easily approach different groups with their own cultural framework, using values from that to unfavourably judge those with differing sets of values (Storti, 1998). Moreover, they may be unaware of the pervasiveness of that framework to their own thinking, like fish unaware of the pervasiveness of the water in which they swim (Wallace, 2009). Raising awareness of underlying beliefs and assumptions of self and others therefore increases potential for dialogue between faiths and cultures.

My personal reason for interest in this training comes from early life experience. I grew up in Northern Ireland in an era known as 'The Troubles' (1969 – 1998) when intergroup conflict and consequent segregation was normal experience for most people. This sparked a desire within me to encounter and to better understand those of different faiths and cultures, leading eventually to my role at the Kings Centre to help others to do so too. While the situation in Southall is very different to my own childhood experience, it has been shown that when individuals overcome prejudice against or anxiety towards one group then this can become an inherent ability that is transferable to other groups elsewhere (Pettigrew, 2009). The training overall thus aspires to develop ability within participants to accept and to engage with difference through dialogue within their wider interactions in future.

1.2 Reasons for a Digital Component

The need for a digital component to the training comes because this change in thinking towards faiths and cultures is a significant shift for many and can seem too great a task for a single day of training. This has been seen previously within some groups from expressions of concern prior to visiting the faith centres, with a few even unwilling to enter. The digital training has thus been developed in order to counteract this happening. Before coming to Southall, participants undertake digital training to build

openness to a dialogue approach with this study considering how such digital training can help achieve positive outcomes when learners encounter troublesome knowledge. This can then create cognitive dissonance within them, where internal conflict exists between pre-existing beliefs and the new knowledge gained, as first investigated by Festinger (1962).

The digital training undertaken before visiting Southall introduces learners to concepts of culture both visible and underlying and how these are connected, letting them learn through videos of life in Southall, how these concepts will be experienced there, and through completing quizzes, how the visible and underlying are connected, so raising awareness of feelings and unexamined assumptions. Those with prior positive experiences of faiths and cultures can then share these in an online forum, letting others learn from these too. Upon arrival, they then receive additional classroom training to further culturally prepare them to visit the faith centres to meet practitioners, observe and hear of their customs and ask questions to understand associated underlying cultural values and beliefs, followed by group debrief before departure from Southall.

Perkins (2006) describes how the process of encountering troublesome knowledge can challenge learners at an epistemic level, in that it makes a world once familiar to them both confounding and confusing. Lewin's (1947) model of personal change involves three steps of 'unfreezing' that begins with awareness that change is needed, 'changing', where it occurs and 'refreezing', where it becomes set as the norm, a process that clearly can't be instantaneous. Since digital training in this case is delivered asynchronously, space and time become available for this to happen, letting these processes start in safe liminal spaces (Cousin, 2003), before face-to-face encounters begin (Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna, 2006). Festinger (1962) shows that new knowledge causing internal conflict can then lead to cognitive dissonance, with learners finding various ways to resolve this, though not always towards positive learning outcomes. Digital training therefore needs to be used in order to encourage these outcomes, which is considered next.

1.3 Affordances of Digital Training

This study considers features of digital training that facilitate positive learning outcomes, making use of the space and time that it provides. These are referred to as

'affordances', akin to 'design features' since they extend beyond inherent space-time advantages, in that the training is designed for 'action possibilities' in how it is used (Norman, 2013). What digital training potentially 'affords' is considered next.

1.3.1 Negotiating Troublesome Knowledge

Having training only in Southall would mean participants encounter the full sensory experience of entering the faith centres as their initial encounter whereas digital training can instead enable learners to experience and process emotive elements of learning in scaffolded stages through selective use of digital media (Barry and Fulmer, 2004) while still within safe spaces of home or study environments (Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna, 2006).

1.3.2 Learning from Others

Digital training can afford ability for participants to learn from experiences of fellow group members with previous positive contact with different faiths, or to share their own experience of this. This is known to improve intergroup attitudes among those with little or no such contact themselves (Wright et al., 1997) and gives time to imagine how they too can have similar positive contact in future, which can increase the likelihood of it occurring in real-life future contacts (Crisp and Turner, 2012).

1.3.3 Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Finally, digital training can afford ability for legitimate peripheral participation, reading online posts and discussions without needing to comment oneself, so creating opportunity for learners to explore from the periphery of involvement (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This can enable liminal learning stages between 'unfreezing' and 'refreezing' (Lewin, 1947) to then safely occur. Digital environments have greater potential for this compared to classroom contexts in that they can be implemented for learners to avoid giving visual, or even any physical indication as to their active onlooking, which is hard to achieve in face-to-face learning.

This study uses participant interviews to assess the role of these affordances on learning outcomes for the training.

1.4 Structure of this Study

The study is structured using a framework from Wenger's (2009) study of the digital component of a Community of Practice (CoP), a community learning from one another through interaction together. This framework has three fundamental dimensions, here referred to as identity, practice and community, which closely connect with the affordances introduced above, as described next.

1.4.1 Identity Dimension and Troublesome Knowledge

The identity dimension concerns the domain of inquiry of a community, what the community is 'about'. In Wenger's (2009) study, this is around management of a blood condition and in Kings Centre training, around faiths engagement. However, even if identity is well-defined, it can still be challenged through introducing troublesome knowledge. This is seen in Wenger's (2009) study, when community identity is challenged when one member proposes treatment for the condition using natural remedies above Western medicine, with heated debate ensuing. Similarly, in Kings Centre training, the dialogue approach can also be challenged, and has been. This study considers how digital training can afford learners to negotiate this troublesome knowledge through scaffolded learning, also comparing with how learners see it occur on social media.

1.4.2 Practice Dimension and Learning from Others

The practice dimension concerns how community members 'live' the knowledge they acquire, what the members 'do'. In Wenger's (2009) study, this involves sharing health tips and stories and in Kings Centre training, learning from fellow learners of positive faiths engagement and then imagining themselves doing likewise in future. Both approaches are feasible within Kings Centre digital training since typically, some participants in each group come with significant real-life experience, so letting them share, and most come with at least a little experience, so letting them imagine. This study considers how digital training can afford learners to learn from fellow group members through an online forum, and make use of that learning, also comparing with how learning from others occurs on social media.

1.4.3 Community Dimension and Legitimate Peripheral Participation

The community dimension concerns how members interact, expressed in varying levels of participation. In Wenger's (2009) study, an email membership list of 2500+ only sees a few actively posting, with most choosing to learn through 'lurking', or legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), with an example given of the carer of one subscriber describing their own learning through emails up until the original subscriber became deceased. This study considers how digital training can afford learning though lurking, also comparing with the impact on learning of lurking on social media.

Dimensions are listed separately here, but clearly, all are highly interconnected. As we humans all function in three inseparable dimensions, CoPs also function in all of Wenger's three dimensions. They are considered separately here simply to give focus to participant interviews undertaken as part of the study research.

1.5 Role of Social Media in the Study

As indicated above, social media usage is also explored within training participant interviews. Social media is of special interest since it can also provide contact between individuals from very different groups and like the digital training, they can learn from others and have opportunity to negotiate troublesome knowledge, and for this all to occur with peripheral participation. However, if doing these actions does contribute to learning there, then they do not do so by design, and hence, cannot be described as affordances there, unlike in the digital training. Nevertheless, it is still useful to explore participant experience of such learning there, and implications for learning in digital training environments.

1.6 Limitations to the Scope of the Study

Limitations to this study can be observed by noting that Wenger (2009) describes aspects of learning in each dimension that are not addressed here. In the identity dimension, he not only describes how it can be contested but how identity can be spread beyond its natural membership through raising awareness in more public spaces, such as in the medical community. In the practice dimension, he not only describes how participants learn from each other but also from those outside, such as contributions from researchers. In the community dimension, he not only describes different levels of participation but also the role of some overtly as leaders. For each

dimension, only the first part of each pair is addressed in this study since they all naturally occur within the Kings Centre training while those omitted do not. For example, it would be of great interest for faith practitioners to also partake in online activities as outside members, but that is not currently within the training, and so, is omitted from the study. The study could include other training programmes exhibiting omitted features, but not doing so is set as a limitation.

1.7 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness is essential to qualitative studies for increasing reader confidence in rigorousness of findings, with four criteria traditionally considered, as set out by Lincoln (2004): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Aspects of this study raise issues around these criteria, which are now considered.

Firstly, since digital training was still under development when accessed by participants, affordances as described were not yet all fully functional within it. Thus, interviewees were asked not just about their experience of these within the training but also about their aspirations for them. However, the risk to credibility is that these aspirations may not be feasible, for example, from a technical perspective. Consequently, a comparison approach was adopted in that interviewees were asked to describe their experiences of learning on social media and then compare these with their aspirations for the digital training, thus grounding answers in lived experience.

Transferability issues arise around whether these study findings on addressing troublesome knowledge can be justifiably generalised to other contexts given that only one instance of digital training occurs in this study, namely around faiths engagement. Considering this, interview questions were designed to learn about interviewee online encounters with troublesome knowledge in general rather than just in this case. Hence, the experience in Southall was considered as just one example of that, so helping findings to be transferable more widely.

However, since interview participants were not selected to represent any wider population, but rather taken simply as a ‘snapshot’ of people completing training at one given time, interview findings are used to form theoretical propositions rather than categorical truths (Silverman, 2016), with the purpose being to create possibilities to test these propositions further in future.

Confirmability concerns whether study findings were determined by input of participants rather than by researcher biases and requires consideration of how interview data were analysed. This is discussed under Analysis of Data in the Methodology section.

Dependability concerns whether study findings could be consistently attained if replicated elsewhere. This raises the issue that as researcher asking interview questions, I was also instigator of the training, and so, not a disinterested party doing the research. This is discussed under Ethical Dimensions in the Methodology section.

The study now reviews existing literature around concepts introduced above.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Role of Learning Communities

Since Kings Centre training involves learning communities, the role of these is first reviewed in implementing learning. Two metaphors used to describe approaches to learning are those of acquisition and participation, the former perceiving knowledge as a commodity for individuals to acquire and the latter, as actions in activities within a community (Sfard, 1998). Sfard (1998) proposes that these are best combined for optimal learning, as done in this training. The participatory approach is described as involving membership within a community in order to build knowledge of how to work within its norms, in this case, to develop skills to interact with those of different faiths. Similarly, Wenger (1998) includes this approach in his concept of CoPs as a means of learning, describing them as communities that facilitate mutual engagement around a joint enterprise using a shared repertoire of tools and language. He shows how this can be done in digital environments using even simple email technology (2009), although potential for participatory learning in digital environments has grown greatly since advent of Web 2.0 technologies (Land, 2011), which are what is used within Kings Centre training.

From earlier discussion, this study clearly involves learning communities while Wenger's (2009) concerns CoPs, so these are now compared next.

2.1.1 Comparing Learning Communities with Communities of Practice

While learning communities share characteristics of CoPs, they cannot be considered as such themselves (Anderson and McCune, 2013). One clear difference is that while the former always involves formal learning processes, the latter may not, and they are missing in Wenger's (2009) study, where learning comes through informal interaction. Nevertheless, questions arising within CoPs also occur here: Wenger (2009) raises the question of how CoPs use digital technologies to enable learning, which is relevant to learning communities too, and indeed, is the central focus of this study.

Lave and Wenger (1991) originally developed their approach to learning through CoPs in commercial contexts rather than in educational establishments such as the Kings Centre but more often exemplified by colleges and universities. The concept has been widely adopted by these establishments and Wenger's thinking applied to learning

communities there, even though they clearly also differ in various ways. Anderson & McCune (2013) discuss these differences, such as the role of teachers as gatekeepers of knowledge, their time-limited nature of engagement with the practices of the subject, that they cannot assume that a learning culture already exists and lesser variance likely in each of membership, roles and objectives within their limited timespan. One other significant difference is where each type of community is located: CoPs are already situated in working contexts, but learning communities exist in an in-between space (Anderson and McCune, 2013), concerned with how to transfer experience gained there into 'real-life' and so, needing to include paradigmatic trajectories rooted in real-life experience (Wenger, 1998), as exemplified in Kings Centre training by interacting with practitioners at the faith centres.

While recognising these differences, learning communities and CoPs also share significant commonalities. This study considers as such the three dimensions of a CoP, identity, practice and community, from Wenger's (2009) framework. Both types of community have an identity that brings members together, both have a preferred way of practice around their identity, whether around approaches to health management or faiths engagement and in each case, the community dimension is significant, although within learning communities, this will need to be created and modelled, whereas in CoPs, it is already ongoing.

Even though differences exist, much can be learnt about learning communities from existing studies on CoPs. Much can also be learnt from studies on learning communities in other digital contexts too, which are now introduced.

2.1.2 Comparing Learning Communities with Other Digital Learning Communities

Potential exists to learn about use of digital technologies from two other cases of online training programmes that enable intergroup contact. In each case, a digital environment lets mostly monocultural or mono-faith groups interact with groups from other faiths or cultures. The first is in the area of intercultural education programmes. These set out to enable participants to become responsible citizens of diverse societies even if they themselves have been raised in communities that lack such diversity, specifically aiming to provide cultural skills to enable collaboration even if groups are physically separated (e.g. Naiditch, 2013). The second case is intergroup conflict

resolution programmes, which by contrast, involve bringing groups together online that are separated for security reasons even if physical neighbours, such as groups in Israel / Palestine (e.g. Walther et al., 2015) or in Northern Ireland (e.g. Austin et al., 2015), where face-to-face contact may incur personal risk. In both types of training programme, the role of digital technologies has been carefully considered in order to enhance intergroup interaction, and so, can provide applications for use within Kings Centre training. Studies within each area will therefore be referred to as appropriate.

While there may be commonalities, differences also exist between these programmes and Kings Centre training. One difference is that restrictions to face-to-face interactions in the former do not apply to groups coming to Southall. As a result, within the intercultural education programmes, they specifically seek to build cross-cultural communication skills online (Naiditch, 2013). Kruger et al. (2005) describe the challenges in digital communication when sensory cues are reduced, meaning that these programmes therefore develop a different skill set compared to those needed to interact face-to-face, as required in Kings Centre training. Ware (2013) also notes that communication challenges are further exacerbated when cultural differences also exist. Online interaction alone will not achieve skills to enable face-to-face dialogue with visual cues fully present, thus placing limitations to the learning from these types of programme. Developing online communication skills is undoubtedly very worthwhile, but it is not currently part of Kings Centre training.

With intergroup conflict resolution programmes, the purpose is that contact between groups will see prejudice reduced between them as they work together online on superordinate tasks such as a course project within a shared national curriculum. Awareness of cultural differences during interactions is occluded by choices of digital media in order to avoid physical cues that might inhibit them. Digital media is then modified during the programme course to enable visual cues to be increasingly revealed, culminating in some cases in groups meeting face-to-face. Because contact is built up slowly using progressively self-revelatory media (Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna, 2006), preparation training to address potential cognitive dissonance issues is not part of these programmes. By contrast, Kings Centre training focuses on when face-to-face contact occurs and use of digital technologies within preparatory training to promote positive outcomes. Therefore, similarly there will be limitations to learning from these types of programme.

Nevertheless, even with such differences, much can be learnt from each to apply to Kings Centre training, which will be referred to as appropriate within this study.

2.2 Digital Training Affordances within Learning Communities

Existing literature on digital affordances introduced earlier is now reviewed.

2.2.1 Negotiating Troublesome Knowledge

In the identity dimension of a CoP, Wenger (2009) describes how members enquire together around their common identity but that this may still be contested. Such variance in perspective around identity is even more likely within learning communities, with members coming with their own prior experiences yet to find their place within it (Northedge, 2003). Community involvement is part of the process of constructing one's own identity and the learning community will provide a paradigmatic trajectory for learners to converge towards (Wenger, 1998) which creates potential for this to become troublesome knowledge to some participants. Perkins (2006) describes the use of troublesome knowledge as a means of moving learners away from unthinking assumptions and towards epistemic level change, describing it becoming a threshold concept into new ways of thinking around their identity. He outlines various types of knowledge that can be troublesome, but of interest here is what he describes as alien knowledge, that which is in conflict with the perspective of the learner.

Cousin (2003) describes alien knowledge as being of great significance in the field of Cultural Studies, as in Kings Centre training, where it involves seeing interactions with those from other cultures in a different light. Participants unfamiliar with this approach may find that it becomes troublesome knowledge for them. This can then assist in achieving the objectives of the training.

2.2.1.1 Troublesome Knowledge and Cognitive Dissonance

One approach to understanding the outcomes of troublesome knowledge in learners is through cognitive dissonance theory. Festinger (1962) describes cognitive dissonance arising in situations where conflict exists between current internal knowledge structures of individuals and new ways of thinking that they encounter. He shows that this will become more powerful when a high degree of personal investment is involved or if the level of difficulty of subsequent change expected from learners is high. This is

significant since Kings Centre training is in the area of faiths and cultures, a potential area of significant personal investment (Burns, 2006). When troublesome knowledge presented meets these criteria within learners, then cognitive dissonance can be expected to occur.

The desire to achieve internal consistency from cognitive dissonance can result in several reactions in learners. On one hand, it can bring acceptance of the new knowledge encountered, but it can also mean adjustment of one's cognition to justify one's pre-existing position. These will each resolve dissonance for them but it is desirable from a learning perspective that they assimilate the new knowledge to bring about attitudinal or behavioural change. Festinger (1962) describes other reactions that learners can take to justify their pre-existing position, either by increasing its importance to themselves or by decreasing or denying the importance of the new knowledge. In the study of the Seeker cult (Festinger et al., 1956), they are described as experiencing dissonance when the world did not end on their prophetically predicted date, with each of these reactions subsequently seen. Some decreased the importance of missing the predicted date by introducing a new belief that humanity had obtained a 'second chance' due to their own attentiveness to the prophecy. Others also made their existing belief seem more important by promoting a burst of proselytism, swelling the crowd for their cause, seeking to convince themselves that it must be right since so many people converting could not be wrong. For those with less personal investment, they abandoned their belief in the prophecy and put the whole scenario down to experience.

By its very nature, it is hard to objectively know when cognitive dissonance is 'going on' within participants given that it is cognitive. Cooper (2007) describes that scientists of Festinger's era would naturally treat it as a 'black box' that didn't need opened as long as it accounted for the data. He summarises studies seeking objective markers around physiology and participant responses as to its occurrence having varying success, but studies in neuroimaging (Harmon-Jones, 2004) have shown that occurrence of emotion is one consequence of presence of cognitive dissonance. While detecting its presence is still an open question, this study considers emotion on encountering troublesome knowledge as a tentative indication that cognitive dissonance is occurring, and that degree of emotion correlates with levels of dissonance. From a pragmatic perspective, it is this potential outworking of dissonance that is most likely to mean that

participants will not successfully complete the training. As a trainer then, it is appealing to revert to a 'black box' model, that digital training does 'something' internally to learners, that enables them to process troublesome knowledge positively. Within this study, I consider that 'something' to be 'positively resolving cognitive dissonance' while recognising that the question is still open.

Next is consideration as to how these reactions might appear in digital environments, firstly on social media, with literature reviewed around how it can occur there.

2.2.1.2 Troublesome Knowledge on Social Media

Troublesome knowledge might be expected to occur on social media given its potential for diversity of perspectives. Moor et al (2010) report that most people interact in online discussions because they care about the topic, but some do so only to vent general frustrations about life. Only the former is considered in this study. Discussion on social media has potential for people to learn through co-constructing knowledge through dialogue with each other, which defines a social constructivist approach to learning which will raise potential for troublesome knowledge to occur (Perkins, 2006). Social constructivist learning on social media though does not mean that some people have perspectives that are 'right' and others that are 'wrong', and that those with 'wrong' perspectives will experience troublesome knowledge when they encounter those that are 'right'. Instead, concepts of culture introduced earlier also apply there to respect differing perspectives: people's perspectives make sense to them because they are consistent with what they believe in or hold dear, and when one accepts that, one can then figure out how to work with that perspective (Storti, 1998). When encountering differing perspectives on social media, the challenge then is to move from treating them as 'wrong' to instead learning why it makes sense to those holding them, and to learn from them. This can mean introducing troublesome knowledge to one's own perspective, which can in turn create cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance theory can give insight into how social media users react on encountering troublesome knowledge. One reaction is to reduce the importance of the new knowledge, such as when the Seeker cult reduced the importance of missing the prophesied 'end of world' date by considering it as a 'second chance'. On social media, importance of new information can be reduced by readers negatively stereotype those posting, easily done through browsing of their homepage. A further way to reduce

dissonance is to increase the importance of one's pre-existing perspective, as done through proselytism by the Seeker cult (Festinger et al., 1956). This is also achievable on social media through surrounding oneself with like-minded people, so receiving affirmation for one's own position. Another approach is to dismiss the new information as untrue, contrary to evidence. Burns (2006) writing about faith beliefs, suggests that readers avoid implications of dissonance by appearing that they 'just don't get it [the other perspective]' whereas they may instead be 'refusing to get it' since the challenge to their own beliefs is too great. Subsequent behaviours on social media, such as hostile criticism and removing oneself from the discussion altogether (Moor et al., 2010) will be influenced by whether the elements involved are of high importance to people or that the dissonance will create difficult change for them.

Other reactions to cognitive dissonance include becoming a 'lurker', which is better considered using concepts from CoPs, or assimilating the new knowledge to learn from it, both of which are discussed later.

2.2.1.3 Troublesome Knowledge in Classroom Learning Communities

How such reactions to troublesome knowledge occur in face-to-face learning contexts also needs to be considered. Behaviours like hostile comments and opting out are unlikely to occur within learning communities due to the consequences for the learner, both from the educational establishment and the wider CoP. Wenger (1998) describes the pervasive role of the organisation within a CoP requiring members to perform actions to meet its criteria, and this is similar within learning communities thus bringing different reactions compared to social media. Festinger et al. (1959) describe the reaction of forced compliance, where participants publicly follow expected community behaviours but privately still hold their original cognitions. Dissonance continues as a background feeling in this case, and learners may revert to original behaviours when influences affecting behaviour are removed with reactions closer connected to those described when discussing social media, although likely with different behaviours.

This has consequences for design of training content to manage troublesome knowledge. Meyer and Land (2003) describe the need to create 'holding environments' to support students encountering troublesome knowledge, to enable them to work through it positively. Cousin (2003) too indicates that design of curriculum needs to be

sensitively done for teaching Cultural Studies due to the strong affective element involved for learners, which is relevant too to Kings Centre training. Literature is reviewed next on how other communities seek to build such sensitivity into their digital training.

2.2.1.4 Troublesome Knowledge in Other Digital Communities

Within online intergroup conflict resolution programmes, digital media properties can be used to manipulate how learners respond to interacting with those from different groups. Hoter et al. (2009) describe that visual cues can be one potential cause of troublesome knowledge, giving the example of only using audio media during initial online interactions between Muslim and Jewish Israelis to reduce awareness of dress. Amichai-Hamburger et al. (2015) show digital media being chosen through the programme course to gradually increase degree of disclosure up to the point where face-to-face contact becomes feasible. Hung et al. (2005) describe this as a scaffolded approach to learning, where complexity and diversity is introduced gradually, with support provided and then gradually removed from the learner experience. Their study refers to training of school department heads, and while alien troublesome knowledge is unlikely to occur in that context, it shares with the conflict resolution programmes a process of gradual supported disclosure, but this time with skills rather than visuality. These training approaches involve building towards a learning objective in stages with support provided as needed in order to let learners keep working towards that objective. Kings Centre training adopts this scaffolded approach through use of videos to portray what is likely to be experienced in Southall, and then quizzes with content to process these at an underlying cultural level in order to prepare participants to interact with practitioners during faith centre visits. It differs though from the conflict resolution programmes in that it is used in the preparatory training before face-to-face contact occurs whereas they use it during online contact itself, making the Kings Centre approach more accessible in that a shorter term is required to implement it and not all groups needing to be there from the start.

In Kings Centre training, scaffolding also includes learning activities to assist in recognising and understanding how to positively resolve dissonance. McFalls and Cobb-Roberts (2001) describe the concept of metadissonance, which makes learners aware of potential dissonance and providing tools to process it positively. Their study shows that while some participants may resolve dissonance by themselves without

this, numbers doing so will increase with metadissonance awareness also included. The presence of learning activities within Kings Centre digital training is therefore more likely to increase likelihood of processing potential dissonance arising from the visits constructively.

Digital training thus affords opportunity to address troublesome knowledge and manage potential cognitive dissonance within a scaffolded process to achieve positive learning outcomes.

2.2.2 Practice of others

With the practice dimension of a CoP, Wenger (2009) describes how members learn from each other's health approaches and likewise, within Kings Centre training, there is opportunity for learners to learn from each other through sharing positive experience of previous interactions with different faiths and cultures. Festinger (1962) too describes how social groups can help in resolving member dissonance although resolution can take varying forms. The Seeker cult (Festinger et al., 1956) embarking on proselytism is an example of how groups can be used to support pre-existing positions, but they can also play a part in encouraging assimilation of new knowledge. Festinger (1962) describes this using the example of people with racist perspectives working alongside negroes, with their change in behaviour from group interaction eventually bringing a change in beliefs. This connects with Intergroup Contact Theory, which is considered next.

2.2.2.1 Intergroup Contact Theory

One theoretical concept underpinning Kings Centre training is that of Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT) that holds that face-to-face contact between different groups under certain conditions reduces prejudice and improves relations (Hewstone and Swart, 2011). This is clearly relevant for groups meeting faith practitioners in Southall. ICT is already known to work successfully in digital contexts within intergroup conflict resolution programmes already discussed (e.g. Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna, 2006a, Walther et al., 2015).

ICT terminology uses 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' (Tajfel, 1970) in its vocabulary to refer to groups, so these need to be defined. The former is a social group to which a participant psychologically identifies as being a member whereas the latter is one with

which they do not identify. Within this study, 'ingroup' is taken to refer to learning communities and 'outgroups' to communities in each faith centre that learners identify as being outside of their group. These definitions will be revisited later though.

It would be hard to describe those coming for Kings Centre training as prejudiced, but some still exhibit anxiety around interaction and so, aspects of ICT can be used within digital training to potentially address this.

2.2.2.2 Extended and Imagined Contact in a Continuum

While ICT is clearly relevant to face-to-face encounters with faith practitioners during training, potential relevance to digital training comes through extensions connected to it. One is the Extended Contact Hypothesis (Wright et al., 1997a), that proposes that positive impact can come through vicarious experience of contact, where anxiety is known to reduce in ingroup members who know of a fellow member who has had positive interaction with an outgroup member. Another is the Imagined Contact Hypothesis (Crisp and Turner, 2009), that proposes that mental construction of a future social interaction with an outgroup member by itself can also impact positively on intergroup perceptions, akin to psychological approaches in sports coaching to maximise athlete performance or creative visualisation in medical healing techniques. Meta-analyses of both show (Zhou et al., 2018); Miles and Crisp, 2014) that they can have positive impact on perceptions of outgroups in many contexts without needing to meet outgroup members, so both will be referred to as examples of 'indirect' contact, where activities occur where the theoretical principles of intergroup contact apply, but without direct interaction occurring between groups (Crisp and Turner, 2009). No overt reference is made within these analyses to use of digital environments to implement these though, as in Kings Centre training, so this study considers implications of using these in that environment.

Allport (1954) himself, as originator of the hypothesis behind ICT, raised the possibility that a range of contact approaches such as film, drama and information could be used along different stages of intergroup interaction. More recently, Harwood (2010) proposes similarly, but this time using a continuum of types of direct and indirect contact, combined to achieve greater effect on prejudice. Instigators of Imagined Contact themselves clearly specify it is not designed as a standalone tool (Crisp and Turner, 2012). However, since these approaches are unlikely to appear together by

themselves, research into the effectiveness of a continuum has been minimal. Recent technological advances have raised the possibility of use of a digital learning environment as one such means of implementation. Kings Centre training therefore seeks to implement such a continuum with indirect contact activities online, followed by face-to-face contact in Southall. Extended Contact activities consist of learners watching a video of life in the faith communities in Southall and then sharing their own previous experiences of interacting in a forum, thus also letting others learn from these. For Imagined Contact activities, digital training provides accounts of interactions with faith hosts as well as accounts from fellow learners, and then invites learners to visualise what these might look like for themselves in future. This is known to only have short-term effect on attitudes towards outgroups (Crisp and Turner, 2012) so access to digital training just before visits makes digital environments seem especially suited to host these.

Since most participants are then likely to participate peripherally, the issue of how learners learn through lurking needs to be considered, with literature on this reviewed next.

2.2.3 Participation within Community

With the community dimension of a CoP, Wenger describes members who want to experience 'learning friendship' together but acknowledges that it is not feasible for everyone to be actively posting, risking the community 'imploding'. For most participants then, learning will come through lurking.

2.2.3.1 Trajectories in Learning Communities

Wenger's (1998) description of the identity of participants within a CoP includes it as being a series of trajectories, defining practitioners by where they have been within the community and where they are going, thus indicating the changing nature of one's identity within a CoP over time. One such trajectory he describes is that of being peripheral, where one is part of the community without being fully involved. This offers learners opportunity to observe the ongoings of the community before deciding future direction, what he terms as legitimate peripheral participation. Identity though does not consist of just one trajectory, and Wenger (1998) describes others, such as inbound trajectories where they are moving towards fuller participation in future, or outbound trajectories, where participants are working towards moving out of the community,

often for expected reasons such as a student graduating from school (Wenger, 2000). He also describes boundary trajectories, where the identity of participants links with more than one CoP, and insider trajectories, concerned with renegotiating the CoP identity as circumstances change, such as during intergenerational shift. This sense of movement along trajectories enables participants to know what matters to them within the CoP and what they will choose to be involved in in future. CoPs will provide paradigmatic ways for participants to negotiate each of these trajectories, modelled by existing members.

Trajectories differ though in learning communities compared to CoPs (Anderson and McCune, 2013). In learning communities, due to their time limited nature, boundary and insider trajectories will typically have limited application, as in Kings Centre training with its short duration. Anderson and McCune (2013) describe most learners starting with a peripheral trajectory, and while it would be expected that they move along inbound trajectories and become familiar with community norms, again they describe that this will occur to varying extents and speeds for different learners. They also indicate the need to provide outbound trajectories within learning communities, more so needed than in CoPs. In Kings Centre training, this occurs through interaction with practitioners at the faith centres, where learners are given an indication of possible future outbound trajectories.

Hung et al. (2005) provide a model of how this might work in practice using the study of training of school department heads. They describe how learners move together along a continuum from peripheral to central participation, with opportunity to change from being a novice to becoming an active contributor. While this change occurs in learners, learning activities also change, starting in a simulation stage and then on to participation through supported interaction with practitioners, through to codetermined actions where they work alongside practitioners in real-life situations. This is partly applicable to Kings Centre training, where simulation begins with the digital training followed by the participation stage, facilitated through supported visits to the faith centres. The final stage of codetermined actions will occur after Kings Centre training, when learners go to contexts where they will apply their learning, which is beyond the remit of the training provided.

2.2.3.2 Required Participation

A constructivist approach to learning involves participants actively creating meaning from their experiences, and some argue that since this involves the principle that learning should be active (Gulati, 2008) then participation should be vocal, expressive and assertive (McFarlane, 2014). Oliver and Shaw (2003) show though that this is likely to force compliance in learners, with them wanting to complete the course but without wishing to apply what they learn beyond it. Active learning does not always mean activity, and the constructivist principle of self-directed learning further supports this. Required participation also ignores learner personality differences and their feelings on how safe they feel participating.

Lave and Wenger (1991) by contrast, indicates that lurking provides opportunity to offer learning to those on the periphery, even if they decide to remain peripheral, proposing that this enables them to familiarise themselves with the functioning and viewpoint of the group before they may themselves 'jump in'. Rather than opposing constructivist learning, lurking can better facilitate it in that it lets learners check for overconfidence about knowledge claims and encourages thinking through of ideas before building them into their understanding.

Bishop (2007) approaches required participation from a pragmatic perspective though, arguing that if all learners are lurkers then online discussion is not sustainable, especially in small groups as in Kings Centre training. He does not however propose required participation but rather considers the role of desires and cognitions of learners in determining their degree of participation, suggesting encouragement can come through persuasive text and encouraging comments made to novices about their postings to encourage others to also participate.

Thus, pedagogical arguments for facilitation of lurkers from a constructivist perspective must be balanced with practical arguments for participation to be required to enable discussion to occur at all. Digital training therefore needs to encourage participation while also enabling space for it to occur to differing degrees.

2.2.3.3 Challenges to Reflective Learning

While digital training provides time and space for reflective learning, risks also come from use of digital media. Even though quantity of time for learning increases, the quality of learning within that time can reduce in that learners cannot 'switch off' outside of class any longer, with ongoing pressures to read posts from other learners

(Land, 2011; Allan, 2007; Levy, 2007). Furthermore, it also provides an immediate means of reply compared to 'slow time' enforced in classroom contexts due to the slower nature of communication. Land (2011) acknowledges benefits of digital training accessibility but also highlights potential threats that it poses to enabling learners to enter a liminal state if continuously connected to a digital environment. Amichai-Hamburger et al. (2015) though argue that since learning communities can limit numbers participating, this reduces the need to interact, whereas on social media wider public participation means need for an increased speed of response. Even if digital training is designed to afford usage in particular ways, there is no guarantee that this will be done. Norman (2013) describes that if someone is presented with a ball and a chair, they could sit on the ball and throw the chair even though the affordance of each indicates doing otherwise. While digital training can afford opportunities, it is still the responsibility of the learner to avail of them.

This review of literature prepares the canvas for the methodology of the study, which is considered next.

3 Methodology

3.1 Study Approach

The underpinning approach taken in the study was one of a social constructivist ontology, an approach involving creating knowledge through collaboration with others without assumptions made as to outcomes. This is carried out within the study through the acquisition of knowledge from multiple perspectives using a series of semi-structured interviews. It also used an interpretivist epistemology, as seen in the subsequent interpretation of these perspectives in order to understand the role of digital technologies to provide training within learning communities. The aims of the approach were primarily empirical and applied, firstly empirical in that it sought to analyse accounts of the digital component of the Kings Centre training, and secondly, applied given that findings were then used to form theoretical propositions with potential implications for future implementation of the training. Since inclusion of digital training into the programme has been new and numbers using it are still small, a qualitative approach was chosen for data collection, thus providing the facility to conduct in-depth analysis of themes that arose from the interview data.

Research began with a review of existing literature. This explored use of digital technologies within communities that facilitated learning, both formal and informal. This ranged from CoPs through to communities involved in intergroup communication training and finally, to unstructured communities on social media. Where possible, studies were consulted where digital technologies were used, but studies without significant emphasis on digital components were also including if learning approaches used therein were assessed to be relevant to digital contexts.

The impact of the digital component to the training was then considered through a series of semi-structured interviews. Interviewees were asked if they participated in social media, with alternative questions prepared for anyone not doing so. I considered whether social media usage should be set as a criterion for selecting interviewees but decided against this since it may have meant only interviewing those who viewed social media positively, and so possibly only those with positive attitudes towards digital training too. It transpired though that everyone did already use social media to varying degrees, so these prepared questions were never needed. It would be of interest though

in a wider study to also interview non-users of social media since this may give a more critical set of responses towards the digital training.

3.2 Research Question

Central to this study is the question of how digital technologies can prepare participants within a learning community to negotiate troublesome knowledge that can create cognitive dissonance within them. If troublesome knowledge causes cognitive dissonance in learners, then learning outcomes will not necessarily be positive. Use of digital technologies within a learning community is therefore explored to make these more likely to be so.

The research question can be further subdivided using the three dimensions from Wenger's (2009) framework. Firstly, in the identity dimension, the question concerns how digital technologies enable troublesome elements of the learning experience to be managed. The practice dimension then raises the question as to how digital technologies can again manage troublesome knowledge through use of group participation online. Finally, the community dimension raises the question as to how digital technologies can enable liminal space for learners to work through the process of change involved in negotiating troublesome knowledge positively.

3.3 Ethical Dimensions

Written permission to approach students was obtained both from the Kings Centre and from sending organisations. Individual members returned consent forms acknowledging that they understood the purpose and practice of interviews. Information on these forms also specified the focus of interviews being on attitudes towards digital training rather than towards faith groups, which may have been concerning for some. To achieve this, consideration was given as to how build safety into questions. They were therefore formed to ask generically about differing viewpoints and reactions (i.e. 'how do you observe people reacting online to different viewpoints?') rather than specifically about personal viewpoints to faiths related training (e.g. NOT 'how do you react when you observe viewpoints online about different faiths that vary from your own viewpoint?') They could then choose to discuss either their own reaction or that of others they observed, depending on how comfortable they felt with this.

Asking generic questions also assisted with the dependability of the study, as to whether its findings could be replicated elsewhere, especially since the researcher was also initiator of the training. By asking questions about how other people might experience the digital training, greater opportunity was thus also given for critical comments.

One group providing interviewees had members all from one Asian country, making English not their first language. I therefore made it a selection requirement that they had completed at least undergraduate level degrees at UK universities. This was verified for all who participated.

3.4 Interview Questions

Two groups were approached for interview, consisting of eight and ten participants respectively, with the former producing one interviewee and the latter, four. Both groups were from the Christian tradition although this is not always so. Groups were chosen because of good relationships with both sending organisations and a strong history of their support for the work of the Kings Centre.

Questions for interview were framed using Wenger's (2009) three dimensions of a CoP, They explored how interviewees observed troublesome knowledge, ingroup exemplars and levels of participation within both the digital training and social media, and the effects they perceived of these on learning.

1. Domain of identity: People react in different ways to seeing viewpoints that differ from their own. How do you observe people reacting online to different viewpoints? What do you think encourages or discourages people to be open to different viewpoints online? What assets do you think digital training can bring in encountering different viewpoints before people come to Southall?

2. Practice of others: People not only learn through content but also through the example of others, sometimes in the form of friends or colleagues. How much do you observe people learning from other people online? What do you think they learn from this? What do you think encourages people to learn in this way? What assets do you think digital training can bring in providing exemplars before people come to Southall?

3. Participation within community: People can learn either through actively participating or through only observing. How useful do you think choosing to observe others in online contexts is compared to active participation? What do you think people learn by observing without actively participating? What assets do you think digital training can bring in allowing people to observe before they come to Southall?

Questions about social media were asked open-endedly, with no assumptions made regarding their potential for positive or negative learning outcomes. One final question asked participants to consider the effect on learning of not receiving digital training beforehand but instead receiving all training in Southall, so letting them raise any insights not highlighted above. While they could obviously only answer this hypothetically, it could also help to indicate the significance of the digital training within their thinking.

Interviews were conducted and recorded post-visit to Southall via Skype at times convenient to interviewees. Finding participants for interview was challenging, despite extensive efforts. Many were willing, but few found in practice, with those wanting to help hindered by their activity within wider their study programmes. Recordings were stored digitally and then transcribed manually into Microsoft Word and anonymised, and finally encoded within NVivo.

3.5 Analysis of Data

I approached reading of interview data using Dey's (1993) interrogative quintet of questions, particularly 'Who?', 'Where?' and 'Why?' Considering 'who' the interview parties were, limited metadata existed concerning them, but since the study purpose focused on forming theoretical propositions, their role simply as a 'snapshot' of students sufficed to attain this. However, the role of the interviewer also as initiator of the training was more problematic for analysis, raising the issue of confirmability, as to whether study findings were determined by researcher biases rather than by input of participants. Details of this concern were exacted by considering 'where' it was that questions were investigating, namely social media and the digital training, raising the question as to 'why' these were being compared, whether researcher bias could influence that comparison and whether this could result in putting the digital training unconfirmably in a 'good light'.

To address this issue, I analysed data using categories within NVivo. Most following discussion processes answers to interview questions linearly, but this risks facilitating omission of unfavourable data. Discussion on categories is therefore also included, thus creating an even comparison between social media and digital training. Since interviews were semi-structured, data from interviews were firstly allocated into top-level categories of 'viewpoints of others', 'learning from others' and 'lurking', representing identity, practice and community dimensions already introduced, respectively. Each was further subdivided into categories of 'social media' and 'digital training'. Top-level categories were then examined for common themes, from which categories for analysis emerged, so ensuring their rootedness in empirical material (Dey, 1993). Dey (1993) proposes too for categories not to be created in isolation so that they can relate not just internally to the data but also externally to each other, and hence category sets were selected under each top-level category as shown below, enabling comparison of each set between social media and digital training data.

Table 1: Category Layout for Data Analysis

Identification of categories and their relations to each other are described further in relevant parts of the Discussion section.

3.6 Reflections on the Interview Process

Questions were not provided in advance of interviews in order to acquire immediacy of answer within interviews. However, some interviewees struggled to answer certain questions and in hindsight, it would have been better to send an overview of questions beforehand, so giving greater time to reflect.

Asking generic and observational questions rather than specific and personal seemed to work well with almost all interviewees. Some spoke of their own experience and the rest spoke of what they saw others do, so this appeared to have the desired effect of building safety into questions. One interviewee seemed reluctant to speak about use of social media for other than friendly greetings and provided technical answers to most questions rather than observations about usage. Again, an overview of questions beforehand would have helped with this, or enabled the participant to withdraw if preferred.

The issue of low numbers for interviews was persistent and not totally surprising given the low student throughput at that stage in the training programme. In hindsight, one group was in residence in Southall for ten days, receiving faiths awareness training on just one of those days and so, it would have been better to focus on conducting interviews face-to-face with them while still there, rather than deferring it to after their departure.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Interviewees

Five participants from two learning communities were interviewed in total, four from one group and one from the other. All were completing the training within wider programmes, four as participants, one as a group leader. This meant that they had not 'signed up' as individual participants but were coming as part of their programme, meaning that attendance was not necessarily their own personal choice. Real names are replaced by pseudonyms in discussion below, created by numbering these communities (C1 and C2), followed by order of interview (P1 to P4 in each). I did not ask ages, but I knew that one person was in their late teens (C2P1), with the others estimated to be in their 30s apart from the group leader, who was in their 50s (C1P3).

4.2 Perspectives on Social Media

Since interviewees were asked to compare digital training experiences with that on social media, I first ascertained usage levels of the latter, so informing me of what they were comparing their digital training experience with. All used social media but to varying degrees: one described their casual usage in that "if people have a birthday today […] we send them a gift or a happy message" (C1P4) whereas another expressed that "basically if I'm not sleeping then most of the time I'll be on social media" (C1P1). Regarding how they used it, apart from the former for 'happy messages', only one other described posting "small talk" (C1P3). Hence, interview data mainly describe peripheral participation. One explained their reluctance to post online in that "you can easily quote something or publicity, say, or a word and one thousand people will use it [but …] what discourages me is that it is a two-edged sword, on the one hand it is too fast so I worry about saying something that I cannot take back, which goes on like wildfire" (C1P3). Three said that they read comments from others online, with one saying that within posts they "jump to the comments section [in order to …] get to know other people's views about it, I sometimes do that" (C1P1). By contrast, another commented that they "don't pay too much attention to how people interact online […] what I see is original posts, when somebody posts something then I think about that, but for reactions I seldom follow those reactions" (C1P3).

4.3 Perspectives on Digital Training

Even though interviewees were asked primarily about the digital component of the training, the value of blending it with face-to-face training was expressed as significant by three interviewees, with comments such as "I do see the benefit of having something else, yeah, rather than just going into [Southall based training] cold" (C1P2) and that "[digital] media is literally useful for me because I can see a side of things that I don't see in some areas. So, you can say that it's complementary informational wise" (C1P3) and that "digital and real-life training definitely go hand-in-hand and they both complement each other" (C2P1). One described use of digital training in this way as a "new experience for me, […] other than that it's just been a box ticking exercise for health and safety training online" (C1P2).

Various aspects of digital training were mentioned as advantageous in interviews. One person described its ability to connect learners over distance in that it "could help if we can't come together at the same place before the field trip [to Southall]" (C1P2) and another, the ability to discuss over distance in that "with some of us divided into different places […] we can put the topic in the group and we can share our views and perspectives and opinions" (C1P4). Time conveniences included that when "you've watched [the videos] once so the second time, it will be … kind of … enhance your memory [and that] you can also pause or rewind at any second so it's quite convenient" (C1P1). Both depth and breadth of resources were raised, depth with one describing the benefit of a YouTube video used in that it was "shared by the insider who filmed it [… meaning that …] the person who filmed had to understand some of the issues" (C1P3). This is of interest later given that the person was not actually an insider yet was perceived as such by the interviewee. Appreciation of breadth of resources was shown in the comment that "[f]ace-to-face you can't go other places. That's the thing about media. Nowadays computer media can link you to a lot of dimensions of the information, which is useful […] because you could be exposed to different things very quickly whereas face-to-face, you are more narrow in your focus" (C1P3). Appreciation of video was also raised by one other who "didn't know a lot about Hinduism and I watched your video and for me that was really helpful because it was a condensed summary about it" (C2P1). There was also appreciation of accessibility in that "you just need the internet and you don't need to write things down or anything" (C2P1). Therefore, digital training was viewed positively overall by participants and seen to be of benefit in achieving positive learning from the programme.

4.4 Affordances of Digital Training

Remaining interview data describe perspectives on digital training affordances described earlier. Discussion following converges these responses into themes around the affordances.

4.4.1 Negotiating Troublesome Knowledge

4.4.1.1 Troublesome Knowledge on Social Media

The first question concerned how interviewees observed reactions to different viewpoints on social media and how this compared with digital training. All except one interviewee described seeing reactions on social media, with two mentioning it only being around certain topics, noting that "if it is race, religion or nationality related etc. then people get a bit sensitive in those areas" (C1P1), with the other mentioning it occurring around "political stuff" (C2P1). These topics closely connect with personal identity and with Festinger (1962) describing that cognitive dissonance is more likely to occur the more someone has invested in it, it is not surprising that strong responses occur from these areas being challenged.

While encountering difference on social media ideally gives opportunity to learn of different perspectives, hostile responses were also noted, with comments such as that it was "very easy for discussion to get heated, [involving…] a frank exchange of views" (C1P2), while the younger interviewee described that "with our generation in particular there is a lot of aggression and negativity" (C2P1). One spoke of how difficult it is for learning to occur, noting that "most of the time [people …] would be conservative to their own opinion. I guess most of the users on Facebook are adults, they have their own opinions, and it's hard to change" (C1P1). As far as other reactions to troublesome knowledge were concerned, one described the tendency to find like-minded friends and how software algorithms assisted with this, saying that "the stories they show you are the ones they think you'll like, I think that is kind of counterproductive a bit because then it's very easy to stay in one's own compartment" (C1P2). They also described people switching to lurking or dropping out of the debate, noting that "to save the trouble of having a heated discussion, […] they just stop" (C1P2).

However, not all troublesome knowledge had negative effects on learning. One described seeing real exchanges of views, saying that "maybe they will take the

opposite opinion, but they will usually leave their own evidence to back up their opinion in the comments" (C1P1). Another described someone raising positive troublesome knowledge through "promoting anti-Islamophobia, like trying to, sort of, tackle how can we basically help […] on a day-to-day basis as a white person. So, if […] your friend is a bit racist then you could question her, I suppose that that is a very positive example of that" (C2P1). They went on to describe how the ability to find like-minded friends on social media can also promote learning rather than diminish it, suggesting to "use it to create a bubble, or like a domino effect where one person sees something positive and then posts something positive and it becomes a form of community support for whatever is spoken" (C2P1). Whether positive learning outcomes occurred from these was not pursued in interviews, but the potential was at least seen for it.

The concept of forming community around potential troublesome knowledge like anti-Islamophobia to spread transformative learning raises the question as to whether learning communities can be used likewise to promote learning. Membership of groups on social media is much less defined than learning communities though, thus enabling learning through lurking to occur easier, although also making them more prone to outside disruption, such as heated debates. Learning communities can create 'positive bubbles' too around troublesome knowledge issues such as faiths engagement, but the challenge then is to enable this learning to spread beyond it. Wenger (1998) describes the concept of a nexus of multi-membership where learners partake in more than one community with what is learnt in one benefiting the others. This would work if training participants remained in the community while within their future roles, although this would be hard to implement given that training is seen as part of a linear process of preparation rather than a community to join.

4.4.1.2 Troublesome Knowledge in Digital Training

Interviewees were then asked how these reactions on social media compared to their experiences of encountering different viewpoints within the digital training, particularly around faiths engagement. One described how the digital training "helped me to say there is more than what you just see superficially so I think as a whole the digital media was useful as pre-contact, initial information, [in that …] prior to [coming to Southall …] I was able to watch it and think about it while doing other things during the day. So that gave me a little bit of me-time" (C1P3). They identified the role of the

digital training as "preparing people to think contrary, to have some kind of deeper thoughts, some questions to ask" (C1P3). Another spoke that the digital training "just breaks down that first barrier where you might be a bit apprehensive or whatever. You've got more of an understanding of the context you're going into. That's really beneficial on both sides" (C2P1).

For others, learning from digital training seemed more informational rather than epistemic, with one acknowledging that "before taking the plunge into going to the faiths and meeting the people, having some exposure in the digital format, I guess I observe a little bit of the faith, I think that that is something that makes the process a little bit easier" (C1P2). Another described the digital training being "very useful for us to preview, […] that helps us to understand why we are going to the area and how we are going to learn, and what we are going to see" (C1P4).

There are two possible reasons why this spectrum of learning from troublesome knowledge occurs, ranging from informational to epistemic. One reason arises from Festinger's (1962) findings, in that he shows that reaction occurs more strongly in anyone who has invested more in the topic or for whom it will mean significant change. One acknowledged low investment in the topic because "I've had some experience crossing one culture [from Asia to UK] but my own upbringing is very mono-ethnic, nothing like these multi-ethnic settings in Southall" (C1P2). For participants returning to such home contexts in future, thinking about interacting with different faiths will not mean significant change for them and so learning only needs to be informational. For the older group leader (C1P3), who was not returning and so, would be more likely to interact with faiths in future, it seems significant that they reported thinking through the questions most and that digital training prepared them most for that, suggesting epistemic learning. The other reason that levels of troublesome knowledge may have been low in some is that the digital training had its desired effect, effectively to scaffold it before they came, to let it be negotiated positively. This is supported in the comments above about the ability of the digital training to preview the visit, although it was not explored in detail whether learning was informational or epistemic. In practice, it seems hard to break the learning process down into such detailed stages, and as Perkins (2006) describes, it can be confounding and confusing for learners, and so, not easy for them to analyse either.

4.4.1.3 Indicators of Existence of Cognitive Dissonance

In this study, one indication of dissonance occurring is that of levels of emotion expressed and so categories of 'identity markers', 'emotions' and 'behaviours' were chosen to let this be compared between social media and digital training experience. When 'identity markers' are challenged then presence of 'emotion' is an indicator of cognitive dissonance, and consequent 'behaviours' are then of interest.

'Identity markers' under social media were "race, religion or nationality" (C1P1), "political stuff" (C2P1), "conservative" (C1P1), and "a bit racist" (C2P1). When participants observed challenge to identity in these areas, behaviours rather than emotions were described, of people "get[ting] a bit sensitive" (C1P1), for "discussion to get heated" (C2P1) and "aggression and negativity" occurring (C2P1), that those observed would "just stop" or "stay in one's own compartment" (both C1P2), with other participants being perceived as "hard to change" (C1P1). These could be expected behaviours for resolving dissonance, either by increasing the importance of one's own perspective by staying with like-minded friends or in reducing the importance of other perspectives by forming opinions about the inflexibility of the person presenting it, and strength of reaction indicated from considering that dissonance is greater when issues greatly invested in are challenged.

Under digital training, 'identity markers' did not feature since questioning focused on faiths awareness. 'Emotions' arising observed were "a bit apprehensive" (C2P1) and one indicating nervousness in "taking the plunge" (C1P2). However, consequent 'behaviours' differed from those on social media, with the digital training "preparing people to think contrary" and to have "deeper thoughts" (both C1P3), a more reflective approach suggesting ongoing change processes. Whereas the former shows negative resolutions to cognitive dissonance, the latter indicates positive resolutions. From this analysis, there is therefore evidence that while digital training won't remove emotion, it helps learners to manage it when encountering troublesome knowledge.

4.4.1.4 Scaffolding Troublesome Knowledge in Digital Training

Scaffolding involves hiding some of the troublesome knowledge to be encountered while also selectively revealing other parts in stages and helping learners to process this. The digital training before the Southall visit enables learners to preview only the aurality and visuality of the faith centres to be visited, with preparatory training alongside on how to understand these from a cultural perspective, aiming to make

troublesome knowledge negotiable for learners. In the case of Hoter et al.'s study (2010), even these sensory elements are initially hidden, with initial interaction only occurring through text messages. This raises the question of how much and what to hide to different groups during digital training. Again, levels of investment by learners in the topic and what consequences might be for significant change are significant in helping to decide this. In Hoter et al.'s study (2010), revealing the clothing of participants from other groups at an early stage would likely risk jeopardising the whole programme for some as it would raise troublesome knowledge for them while still within their home communities. In the case of the Kings Centre training, these issues are typically less so and therefore, greater sensory information can be revealed during the digital training. Additional stages of scaffolding could also be added though, such as inclusion of faith hosts in online activities if sensitivity was greater. But there is no one universal easy answer to this question. In the past, the prospect of visiting the faith centres for some individual students has raised significant troublesome knowledge for them due to their personal backgrounds, but I have been prepared for this by group leaders and so adjusted the training to change the scaffolding appropriately. It is important then to be aware of one's learning community before introducing them to the training online.

Preparatory digital training not only contains audio and visual content about Southall but also has training activities on how this can be worked through to enable participants to negotiate troublesome knowledge within themselves. Two interviewees spoke appreciatively of this content, with one saying that it helped them not to "have watched the videos with no particular thoughts in our heads [… but rather that …] it gave us another way to watch the video again and think about some more stuff" (C1P1). The study by McFalls and Cobb-Roberts (2001) on metadissonance demonstrates that such additional content to show learners how to process potential dissonance increases the prospects of them being able to do so positively. Scaffolding of digital media can assist in negotiating troublesome knowledge, but results can be enhanced with use of such content to enable stages to be managed well.

Proposition One Digital training can enable learning experiences involving troublesome knowledge and potential cognitive dissonance to be scaffolded using considered selection of digital media to manage possible emotive consequences positively.

One comment above raised the concept of 'bubble' online learning communities becoming formational to nurture positive perspectives. This links to the next section, concerning digital activities based on ICT, letting learners learn from each other and start to imagine this working in practice.

4.4.2 Practice of Others

4.4.2.1 Learning from Others on Social Media

The next question asked how interviewees observed people learning from others on social media and how this compared to digital training. All except one interviewee described observing this happening on social media. One told that "when [someone's] story is posted online, people will try to learn from these stories and apply in their own lives [while also acknowledging that teenagers …] are really easy to be influenced by negative language or viewpoints" (C1P1). While one mentioned friends and family, sources from beyond were very influential for four, "from someone you admire. Famous people have huge impact […] what you see every day on social media becomes part of your set of viewpoints" (C2P1). The other two interviewees (C1P2 & C1P3) both referred to learning from influential people too. One reason why these people were followed was given as "maybe they have a successful life or a very organised lifestyle. Most of [the followers] would be chasing their dreams and also it suits the current popular trend" (C1P1).

However, caution was expressed as to credentials for this by two interviewees, creating difficulty for them in knowing who to heed in that "everyone wants to be a model or an idol style or hero […] to let people think they are successful, just too many of them, you can't really judge who is right or wrong" (C1P1). The issue of trust was also raised by one other, saying that for learning from people online, "I take it with a grain of salt […] There is a certain 'fakeness' in it, if I can use that word, in social media. For example, mostly positive if somebody shares something, I notice people share things for lots of happy smiles […] Very few share hard things, you know, real pains in life" (C1P3).

4.4.2.2 Learning from Others in Digital Training

With the issue of trust seen as significant on social media, I then asked how this compared with what they observed within the digital training. This issue also arose there, with one saying "I think I will learn better through face-to-face conversation

rather than … I'm not sure how you can apply [learning from others] to digital training because you can't talk to that person face-to-face, you can't be sure what's there […] you can sometimes fake your attitude or viewpoint on digital but in reality it's harder to hide them" (C1P1). No other mention was made of learning from others online. When one other was asked about learning from others in the digital training context, they did not answer directly about that context but instead spoke that such learning "can come in a lot of different contexts. I think when we were in Southall, we all supported each other in a role model sense, especially the older people like […], also the people leading the different talks, and yourself and everyone leading the whole programme" (C2P1). It is notable that even though they referred generally to learning from others, they particularly highlighted various authority figures to learn from. One other also spoke of learning through authority figures in that "the information that Kings Centre did that and Peter Tate did this was useful for us to learn, to see, I think that is positive" (C1P3). Two others (C1P2 & C1P4) spoke of their conscious decision not to partake in online activities involving learning from others with no reasons given, with comments such as "the digital platform functioned well as a place to host the content but it didn't, well we didn't take it up as a tool for discussion or interaction" (C1P2).

The digital training was designed so that participants were asked to imagine their own future contacts after reading of positive experiences from fellow participants. However since uptake on the latter was low, it meant that there was limited response to the question about imagining oneself interacting with faith practitioners in future, with just one comment that "it sort of helped me to dip a toe into the new experiences" (C1P2). It seems therefore that issues of trust on social media also apply to digital training.

4.4.2.3 Establishing Trust within Digital Training

After this aspect of the training elicited such a poor response, I asked myself if this was due to my implementation of these activities. There are undoubtedly potential improvements to make, although I had tried several formats in beta versions with similar levels of success.

However, comments above on social media and on the digital training indicate something deeper occurring regarding trust, which affects online implementations of ICT. This is confirmed in the category analysis of 'responses to authority', the best being to "try to learn from these stories", but also that "teenagers [are] really easy to be

influenced", and that you "can't really judge who is right or wrong" (all C1P1) and the authority is be "take[n] it with a grain of salt" since there is "a certain 'fakeness' in it" (both C1P3). Within the digital training, only face-to-face authority sources were mentioned, apart from one, coming with a warning that they "could fake [their] attitude" (C1P1). There was thus shared lack of trust both on social media and digital training, with trust only given in the latter when contact was face-to-face.

It is notable that studies described earlier on online conflict resolution programmes between historically prejudiced groups describe their running over a long term, at least that of a college term, so providing time for trust to build between groups. Chamberlin-Quinlisk (2012) refers to McLuhan's assertion that "the medium is the message" to argue that media formats carry meaning in themselves, and for these learning activities involving indirect contact, the message of 'not trusting' seems to powerfully override instructional messages in the activities themselves. Neither activity worked within the Kings Centre training, with comments from above suggesting the issue of trust was contributory towards this. For sharing experiences online, the message from the digital media raises questions about whether what others share is trustworthy. For the activity involving imagining oneself interacting, it seems on the surface that where one is asked to do this, face-to-face or online, is not relevant since both end up in the same imagining exercise. However, the message from the digital media seems to again reduce trust in participants that this is possible, given that the online accounts of others interacting well is not trustworthy and that those giving instructions online may not warrant trust either.

Neither of these meta-analyses of these two hypotheses considers whether digital media were involved in the studies analysed, even though it seems that use of digital media can significantly shape results. One academic in this field referred me to one case they knew of where an imagined contact exercise had been conducted through online instruction (Lai et al., 2014) although this is not recorded in the study metadata. In referring me to this, their comment was that it was "where [the imagined exercise] wasn't effective unfortunately" (personal correspondence). This was not investigated further within the study since that was not its focus, but it seems that outcomes of indirect contact activities online can be affected by the message of diminished trust from the media.

Establishing support from authority figures for the contact exercise was one of the criteria in Allport's (1954) original intergroup contact hypothesis, and this has been applied in subsequent studies since. Understandably, this criterion has not been applied to indirect contact studies since it hasn't seemed relevant given that physical contact does not actually happen. However, since issues with trust occur when digital media is used, it may be that this criterion of support from authority needs to be applied when online aspects occur within the exercise.

Proposition Two In indirect contact activities, use of digital media to convey instructions or to learn of the experience of others can significantly affect trust in the message and therefore needs to be considered in the design of these activities.

Two potential implications exist for digital training. The first involves revisiting the definition of 'ingroup', beforehand taken as referring to fellow group members. However, 'ingroups' extend beyond this to include 'people like us' in wider society outside of the local group. Comments from interviews describe certain authority figures as being more trusted, particularly older people and training leaders, and these seem ideal candidates for use in online case studies within digital training, as a means of learning from others. Wenger (1998) supports this when discussing the concept of providing paradigmatic CoP trajectories for learners through the example of 'old-timers', whom he describes as "living testimonies to what is possible, expected, desirable" (Wenger, 1998, p.156).

The second implication comes from comments describing how meeting people face-to-face enables trust to develop towards them, letting participants become "sure what's there" (C1P1). This suggests that learning from others online would be better placed after participants have met face-to-face, after leaving Southall. This may be a better place too to address other issues, with one participant saying off-record that they liked the dialogue approach, but that it would not be possible to apply it in their home context due to the degree of antipathy towards the different faiths found there. Ironically then, they could have come to training with one dissonance and would be leaving it with another, which is where online community could then assist. However, this would be hard to achieve in practice given the short duration of their contact with the Kings Centre training, but worth noting for other settings. Ultimately, the role of

this training can only be to plant seeds. It seems though that digital media is better used to continue trusting relationships rather than to create them.

4.4.3 Participation within Community

4.4.3.1 Lurking within Social Media

The final question asked how people learnt on social media through lurking, and how this compared with the digital training. The original aspiration was for participants with experience of positive intergroup contact to post about these online so that those without these experiences could learn on the periphery and then imagine doing so themselves. However, the issue of trust from before significantly dented the prospects of this happening. Nevertheless, it is still worth examining interviewee responses to determine findings applicable to future training.

Four of the interviewees expressed that they learnt to varying degrees from observing others on social media. One described the advantage of the breadth of viewpoints in that you "get lots of people coming in and rather than expressing your own opinion you can step back to see what other people think" (C1P1). Different ways of learning through observing were described. One saw it as a means of refining their topic knowledge, describing how they could be "reading a discussion then, yet I haven't said anything on the forum, yet I pick up comments that are more constructive or whatever, and there's something added to my thinking" (C1P2). They also described learning about behaviour within discussions, describing that they observed "not only what people say but also the way they say it […] how someone also takes into account differing views rather than just playing one's own dramas" (C1P2). This connects closely with Wenger's (1998) concept of learning the norms of CoPs through observing others interacting, beyond just acquiring knowledge. One other spoke of observing in a 'political' sense, not around party politics but in its original meaning of learning about one's position in 'the life of the city', saying that "observing is very useful because that's how I know what's happening and I know what people are talking about and how they feel" (C1P3). They described following "Donald Trump, who quotes on Twitter all the time. I added him to get news … but … I don't follow [him as a supporter] … I do for ideas' sake … I do follow a few people […] just for information" (C1P3). This then let them position their own perspective within a wider plethora of positions.

It is clear even in these few interviews that significant learning through lurking occurs on social media at multiple levels of informational, behavioural and political that is easily overlooked. As one suggested "maybe there are a lot of instances of people changing their minds which are hidden from view" (C1P2).

4.4.3.2 Lurking within Digital Training

The question then arises as to how this latent energy from lurking can shift from social media into digital training. Most interviewees mentioned the limited number of postings made by other participants within the digital training and so, limited opportunities to learn from observing others. One potential answer would be to make participation required, with one commenting that "maybe you need to do a more encouraging way to encourage people to do that […] you can't know what other people are thinking about unless you ask them" (C1P1). However, there is risk that this creates a situation where learners simply learn to 'play the game' without significant critical engagement (Oliver and Shaw, 2003) rather than creating desire for deep learning. Furthermore, Gulati (2008) identifies that the monitoring of communication on forums is likely to erode trust in digital media, and this even further than already apparent. It therefore does not seem feasible in this type of training to make participation required.

There seems initially to be a contradiction though between these high levels of learning reported and that learners do not trust what other people post online. One factor that may resolve this is verifiability. On one hand, one cannot verify when people posting online describe their 'good relationships' with those of different faiths, and it is not possible to verify whether imagining interactions will work as well as those proposing it imply. Inability to verify means for learners, inability to trust. On the other hand, it is possible to verify learning that comes through observing interactions online, whether it is points made in a discussion involving differing perspectives or how people behave towards each other within that discussion or the wider picture of how one's own perspective fits with those represented there. In training situations, behavioural aspect of learning can be learnt through watching dialogue since observing others involves learning the norms of how to conduct oneself within that community, how to question one another's thinking, how to stimulate one another to push themselves further and how to disagree with each other. In less exemplary discussions elsewhere, they can also see how not to behave, and by watching different types of discussion they can build a set of criteria as to what is appropriate and what is not regarding what constitutes good

community practices. This connects closely with Wenger's (1998) concept of learning ways of engaging through observing the interactions of those who are central participants in their area of expertise and presents a means of learning from others even when trust is missing.

Proposition Three Within digital training, the sum of learning from monologues about individual perspectives is exceeded by the sum of learning from dialogue between those perspectives, where learning also occurs at levels beyond simply giving content.

Within Kings Centre training, this could be achieved through podcast or video of interactions between ingroup and outgroup members, so also demonstrating appropriate ways of engaging with different faiths.

4.4.3.3 Balancing Learning from Lurking

One risk connected with learning from lurking becomes clear through category analysis. Categories selected were 'others' thinking', and 'own thinking' in order to analyse what happens between them while lurking. Due to lack of lurking occurring in the digital training, these categories only arose in social media interview data, although learning can still occur from this.

No significant positive or negative expressions against learning from 'others' thinking', with comments such as "lots of people coming in" to share (C1P1), "differing views" (C1P2) and "what people are talking about" (C1P3). Comments emerging from the 'own thinking' category were "step back to see what other people think" (C1P1), "something added to my thinking" (C1P2) and lurking "for ideas' sake" (C1P3). These comments strongly tend towards an acquisitional approach to learning though, rather than participatory (Sfard, 1998), and highlight that lurking alone can cause a shift in learning approach. Only one mentioned 'own thinking' becoming 'own participation', but they referred to it not complimentarily as people "playing [their] own dramas" (C1P2). While lurking provides a powerful way to learn, the design of digital training needs to ensure that it blends with other activities to also encourage participation.

5 Conclusion

Digital technologies can make use of aspects of identity, practice and community to address troublesome knowledge around faiths engagement, but not as I had first expected.

For preparing to interact with different identity groups, scaffolding of training through use of digital media with content to process it, did make a positive difference for interviewees. I did not investigate how much of a difference the media and content each made, and how well one would work without the other. This could be a topic for future research. I will continue to use both together within Kings Centre training.

For learning through the practice of others, my expectation was that social media would not produce significant learning whereas digital training would. I was certainly surprised how much learning can, and does occur through observing others on social media, at multiple levels of learning. It may have been though that I interviewed two especially discerning groups on this, which highlights one of the limitations of this study. Future research could be to test this in a bigger group that is selected to be more representative of a wider population.

Adding activities to Kings Centre training to learn from others is challenging though. Levels of trust sufficient to learn from other participants is not enough to warrant these sharing activities and time does not allow for trust to be built. The use of respected figures in case studies would help, but on social media, they were still not well trusted, so it is unknown how effective this would be.

For learning within community, observing dialogue was significant but there are practical challenges in having this happen during training, and recorded dialogue between trusted figures could address this, with learning activities added to help learners to observe how these figures 'behaved' within it. Trust issues are less likely to occur in this case since learning is verifiable through observation. This could be implemented within Kings Centre training.

Finally, the overarching question is: could "Digital Technologies" be omitted from this study's title? Could everything described occur instead in safe classroom spaces with suitable digital media? For me, the answer is "Yes, but…" for both pedagogical and practical reasons. Pedagogically, if learners need to address epistemic change, then this

takes time, and digital training can provide that. The conflict resolution programmes show that addressing this in classroom contexts requires significant time investment, which is impractical for many people. Digital training therefore makes this more available to more people. Shifts in thinking do not fit neatly into schedules, as expressed in interviews by one participant speaking of thinking through issues while doing everyday things. Again, digital training lets this happen without significant classroom time commitments needed.

It seems at times that society is becoming increasingly polarised at a time when digital technologies should be making it increasingly connected. There is need to learn to listen to 'people NOT like us' without the associated troublesome knowledge about what that might mean becoming a deterrent. I believe that digital training like this used appropriately can help achieve this.

(15889 words)

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