


A theology rhizome


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This article contains suggestions to the Faculties of Theology in South Africa about an alternative way and direction to educate their students in this metamodern era. Because any learning in a specific profession implies lifelong and lifewide learning, the suggestion also includes the alumni of the faculties. This is all about rhizomatic learning, which involves both the educators and their students in an interactive and student-centred relationship where both parties act on an equal basis when deciding on the content and direction of the learning process for a specific year. It also involves the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and large language models such as ChatGPT. This is therefore an appeal to the educators of the Faculties of Theology in South Africa to become highly empowered resourceful online educators (HEROEs), also called *recently minded educators* (with no age restriction), taking a fresh look at the way in which they are currently teaching their 21st-century students and to maybe reconsider it in light of this article.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: Good contemporary theological education would mostly result in good Theology students and good pastors. This article suggests an alternative way to teach our students in the current metamodern era. Rhizomatic learning fits into the technological era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as well as Education 4.0, Learning 3.0 and the posthuman era.

Keywords: Theology; rhizome; rhizomatic learning; lifelong learning; life-wide learning; student; educator.

Knowledge exists only in a web of relationships and education's primary goal should be to facilitate the development of learning communities where students can engage in meaningful relational activities with their peers and with the world outside. Rhizomatic learning networks are self-organized collectives able to demonstrate emergent properties like novelty and innovation. (Brailas 2023:1)

Introduction

Rhizomatic learning originates from the thoughts and works of two philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ([1987] 2005) near the end of the previous century. These philosophers got their idea from a rhizome in nature. A rhizome is a horizontal plant stem that consists of nodes that form multiple roots and shoots that can in turn develop new plants¹ with no centre or defined boundary (Cormier 2008:1), like the ginger plant or ginger root (Figure 1) (Munipalli & Haak 2023; cf. Britannica 2024). In this plant, there is a continuous interconnectedness between each part of the plant through its roots, complemented by continuous new creations of the plant (Deleuze & Guattari [1987] 2005:7). Although this approach was developed in the postmodern era (cf. Dillon 2016:90) and is regarded as a post-structural philosophy (Koseoglu & Bozkurt 2023:1), it was popularised by Dave Cormier (2008) in the metamodern era (cf. Bentley 2018:723).

When applied to education, this article attempts to indicate how this concept can be implemented to all the people (educators, students, pastors and others) who are involved in Theology in South Africa. Because learning should be both lifelong and lifewide (Thwe & Kálmán 2024), graduates do not stop learning when they leave university, as that point in fact marks the next phase of their learning process, wherever they apply their theological education, be it in a congregation, in society or in the academy.

An educator could readily ask, 'Why another type of learning? What is wrong with the old traditional way in which we were taught?' Cormier answers these questions quite well: 'The existing educational model with its expert-centered pedagogical planning and publishing cycle is too static and prescribed to accommodate the kind of fluid, transitory conception of knowledge

1. Actually, a rhizome consists of both the root and the stem, a 'horizontal underground plant stem capable of producing the shoot and root systems of a new plant' (Britannica 2023). It is also called a creeping rootstalk (Britannica 2023).

Read online:


Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.



Source: Britannica, 2024, 'Ginger: Plant', *Britannica*, viewed 25 March 2024, from <https://www.britannica.com/plant/ginger>

FIGURE 1: Roots of ginger plant.

that is necessary to understand the simplest of Web-based concepts' (Cormier 2008:1). Cronjé also gives a resolute answer to these questions: 'The ubiquity of technology has moved the locus of learning from between our ears to between ourselves' (Cronjé 2023:n.p.). Brailas (2020:3–4) puts it in a wider sense: 'This [referring to *rhizomatic learning*] is a perspective that locates learning not in the head of an individual being, but in the web of relationships between that person and the world'. The suggestion is that 'traditional' (implying old-style individual learning) should be replaced by 'communal' (group learning) because $2 > 1 + 1$ (where 2 constitutes the group and 1 refers to separate individuals).

Education within the current eras

In the teaching and learning process, there are at least two prominent sides – those of the educator and the student. In a traditional setup, these two roles are strictly demarcated with the educator 'having all the knowledge' and transferring it (mostly and preferably) in a classroom environment, therefore in a straited space where the knowledge that is transferred is confined to 'paths between fixed and identifiable points' (Deleuze & Guattari [1987] 2005:xi) to the students 'who do not have sufficient knowledge'.² Cronjé (2023:n.p.) refers to this as a 'deficit-based curriculum', which implies that the students 'lack' something and the educators 'supply the missing knowledge, skills or attitudes'.³ This kind of teaching actually belongs to the Education 2.0 (cf. Huk 2021:38) and Learning 1.0 eras (cf. Wheeler 2012a, 2012b), which formed part of the Third Industrial Revolution era during the later parts of the previous century (Narvaez Rojas, Alomia Peñafiel & Loaiza Buitrago 2021:4). Currently, the world finds itself in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (cf. Lee & Lee 2021), together with the Education 4.0 (cf. Ryan & Tilbury 2013) and (almost) Learning 3.0 eras (cf. Wheeler 2012b).

2. This kind of education is linked to learning outcomes, which can eventually be assessed in examinations, if and when required (Koseoglu & Bozkurt 2023:2 of 13).

3. Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2005:xi) refer to this kind of learning as 'striated' or 'gridded' space, where learning is confined to 'paths between fixed and identifiable points'.

In the 'new' teaching process called Education 4.0, indicated by Cronjé (2023:n.p.) as 'asset-based education', the demarcation between educator and student has become very vague. In this era, student-centredness is key to the success of education, with at least two outstanding features: Flexible learning and flexible pedagogy. Flexible learning refers to the fact that a student is no longer bound by time, space, limited activities or even media to determine their studies, as they have the freedom to study whenever and wherever they want to – 'anywhere, anytime, and anyhow' (Caldwell et al. 2023:3). They are also allowed by the educators, who aim to build their students' capacities by providing them with innovative ways to navigate through the curriculum to utilise, within parameters, the media and information of their personal preference (flexible pedagogy) (Ryan & Tilbury 2013:8). This includes the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLMs)⁴ such as the chatbot generative pre-trained transformer called ChatGPT. AI is a (Cavalcante 2023):

[S]et of techniques that actually enables computers to think. [AI] can incorporate new knowledge without altering its operation and without disturbing all the other information that is already stored in [it]. (p. 62)

The Learning 2.0 era has changed the traditional top-down mode of education to an interactive bottom-up mode, thereby constituting a hierarchy (an unranked or non-hierarchical system) where the educator and their students determine their 'curriculum' for the year together and where both the learning material and learning process are determined interactively (Wheeler 2012a). The student is therefore more involved in the education process, which immediately gives them agency and causes them to take ownership of the study material and their studies. Here the 'community' becomes the curriculum (cf. Cormier 2008). At this stage, education is already moving into the Learning 3.0 era, associated with Web 3 (cf. Essex, Kerner & Gillis 2023), operating within a 'meta-web' – 'a semantic based architecture of webs' where AI is playing a more significant role (Wheeler 2012b).⁵

All of the aforementioned takes place within the realm of the 4IR. This era builds upon the Third Industrial Revolution where the world was already interpreted as an 'information society' (Narvaez Rojas et al. 2021:4; Hlatswayo 2022:5) based on the extended use of computers, smartphones and the internet. Currently these are complemented by many technologies and inventions such as AI and robotics, to name but a few (Ivaldi 2022:2; Narvaez Rojas et al. 2021:4).

Furthermore, Cronjé (2023:n.p.) postulates that we are also living in an era where humans are no longer in charge – the era of posthumanism (Hassan 1977:843). In this era, humans are living *alongside* machines (technology, including AI), which is called a cyborg (Cronjé 2023:n.p.). This era reduces

4. Mearian (2024) gives a definition: 'Large language models are the algorithmic basis for chatbots like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Bard'.

5. However, Cavalcante (2023:64, 65; cf. Aghaei, Nematbakhsh & Farsani 2012:2) believes that the world is already operating with Web 3.0 and is actually preparing itself for Web 4.0 – still being 'an underground idea'.

humans to being just another species, having a fallible intelligence compared to AI.

In the discussion of the different eras mentioned above, the term 'AI' appears regularly. This is because nowadays AI forms part of our existence, whether we like it or not. The fact that some people believe that there is no God does not nihilate God or take away his existence. The same reasoning applies to AI. In the education process, the educator should therefore take note of AI and apply it legally and within the parameters of their education process because the students are going to use it, either with or without permission.

Then the locale of education: Educators should take note that the classroom is not a precondition for education anymore. The precondition today is connectivity, comprising the internet, a computer, a tablet and/or a smartphone. These have implications for (prospective) students who do not have connectivity. However, according to the 2022/2024 statistics for South Africa (McInnes 2024), there are not so many students who are deprived of these luxuries anymore:

- More than 45 million of the approximately 65 million people living in South Africa are using the internet (indicating that they have Wi-Fi). They are from all ages. Twenty million are therefore deprived of that luxury or they cannot or do not want to use it (too old or too young). However, according to Labuschagne (2023), the latest census indicates a total of 21.1%, which equals approximately 13.7 million people.
- Approximately 10% (6.5 million) of South Africans are elderly – above 65 (StatsSA 2022). Just over 3% of these elderly people are using smartphones to access the internet (Statistica 2024). Therefore, more than 5 million of the elderly can be deducted from the 13.7 million, as they do not (want to) use the internet.
- According to the 2022 figures (Hall 2023), almost 21 million of the population are under 18 years of age and are therefore not eligible to be students at institutions of higher education.

Notwithstanding these figures, fact is that there are still people or (prospective) students who do not have these luxuries. Therefore, if a student wants to study at a university and does not have these facilities, it is highly recommended that the university supplies it to them in cooperation with an internet service provider.⁶

Rhizomatic education

It is common knowledge that there are many suggested and appraisable approaches or types of learning worldwide, such as transformative learning (cf. Mezirow 1991), situated learning (cf. Lave & Wenger 1991) and experiential learning (cf. Dewey 1938), to name but a few. The author of this article has, however, chosen against these (traditional) models, for rhizomatic learning. The implication is not that rhizomatic

6. Here we must keep in mind how universities supplied their students with bandwidth and even electronic devices during the lockdown stages of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) (Hlatswayo 2022). Admittedly, everything did not (always) go smoothly during that time, as it was and still is a learning process.

learning is *per se* proposed as the panacea for the teaching of Theology in South Africa, but that the author submits it to the Faculties of Theology to take note of it and consider the implementation of it for themselves in order, maybe, to address the era in which we live in a better and more meaningful way.

Nowadays, it is quite easy to access information: Just use the web and search for the specific information, find it and download it. This information then has to be filtered, compared and integrated, while one has to interrelate available resources and develop new connections of meaning (Brailas 2023:2). However, the focus in this kind of knowledge gathering falls on consumption and production, instead of interaction and the 'formation of meaningful and transformative synergies' (Brailas 2023:2).⁷ The latter is the kind of transformative knowledge that is generated in participatory learning communities, in this article called rhizomatic learning or rhizomatic education.

Before discussing rhizomatic learning *per se*, it is important to add a note on *knowledge* and *intelligence*. Firstly, what exactly is knowledge? Within a non-rhizomatic (traditional) environment, knowledge of a specific subject is measured through checks and balances against a set curriculum, which represents a pre-existing body of knowledge (Cormier 2008:2). Contrary to this traditional framework, Horton and Freire (1990) argue:

If the act of knowing has historicity, then today's knowledge about something is not necessarily the same tomorrow. Knowledge is changed to the extent that reality also moves and changes...It's not something stabilized, immobilized (p. 101), even in Theology.

Steward (2002) adds that knowledge represents:

[P]ositions from which people make sense of their worlds and their place in them, and from which they construct their concepts of agency, the possible, and their own capacities to do. (p. 20)

This calls for social learning practices where students could, for example, work in groups on the internet – a rhizome – as the internet is capable of expanding a multiplicity of social learning aspects. According to Cormier (2008) these groups form their own curricula:

[T]hrough their own negotiations of knowledge [with each other and the educator] and [form] their own personally mapped networks, thereby contributing to the rhizomatic structure in their field of study. (p. 3)

In this way, the group ('community') becomes the curriculum, as stated above.

Secondly, the case of intelligence: Intelligence is the competence one has to acquire and harness knowledge and skills mostly on a personal level. However, within the new era, this must also be adapted. Intelligence is becoming a commodity such as a data stream on the internet that will be simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. Cavalcante

7. According to Cormier (2008:1 of 6), knowledge has become a negotiation, something already found in social constructivism and connectivism. Both these theories are, however, linked to the organic process of learning from a curriculum.

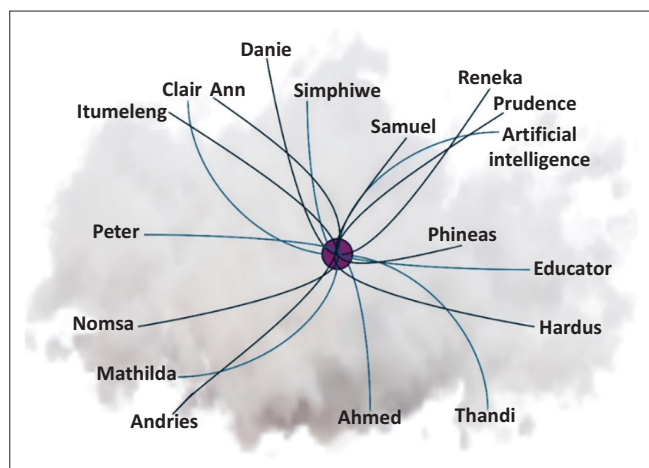


FIGURE 2: A rhizome.

(2023:63) claims, 'In this new structure, we will be part of a collectively created intelligence, in which each person will constantly add new information, helping it to expand and stay current'. This brings us to the point of rhizomatic learning.

According to Bozkurt (2016:7), 'rhizomatic thinking, and by extension rhizomatic learning, is a philosophy, a heutagogical approach,⁸ a critical approach, and a combination of all these'. Koseoglu and Bozkurt (2023:1) refer to it as 'nomad space [which is] smooth or open ended'. It takes place on a specific online (Internet) platform indicated by the big dot in the middle of Figure 2, where the students and their educator(s) are interconnected. This non-linear, horizontal, multiple, heterogeneous and accelerated connectivity is called hyperconnectivity (Cronjé 2023:n.p.; cf. Koseoglu & Bozkurt 2023:1).

In this network, also called an assemblage (cf. Nickerson 2024),⁹ each student adds their research for others to take note of, to argue about, and to add to their own bank of knowledge. Cronjé (2023:n.p.) refers to this approach as collectionism where the rhizome ('unit') does not work according to a set curriculum but collects the needed information in a self-regulating environment or community. This rhizome therefore acts as a 'free information flow between knowledgeable agents...for new knowledge to emerge' (Brailas 2020:8). Brailas (2023) elaborates:

By shifting the focus from the parts to their interrelation and interdependence, rhizomatic learning can be defined as the process of catalyzing the development of a dynamic network of knowledgeable agents, human or even artificial or technobiological actors in the present day, along with their learning resources ... Learning rhizomes are dynamic networks of transformative possibilities, patterns that [are] always moving, always rearranging, ever expanding, always in the becoming. Nevertheless, they maintain every moment an autopoietic structure.¹⁰ (pp. 2-3)

8.Cf. Oliver 2016.

9.An assemblage is the sum total of all the participants in the network. The 'things' in the rhizome are called actants, be they students, the educator, AI or a serious game. Every actant has an equal status, value, agency and importance. Together the actants form an assemblage (stated above) and on their own they are their own assemblage. All these assemblages together form a unit, also called a black box (Nickerson 2024).

10.Maturana and Varela have discussed 'autopoiesis' thoroughly (Maturana & Varela 1972).

Brailas (2020) also refers to the educator's role:

The role of the educator in such rhizomatic ecology is to empower participants to create alternative connections, new networks of thinking, and new patterns of relating with each other, and with other available human nodes or non-human learning resources. But it is not the educator that actually educates the students. The rhizome as a whole becomes the teaching apparatus, a multiplier of perspectives, and an amplifier of synergies. In such epistemology of learning, the primary role of the educator is not to teach in a straightforward manner, but rather to catalyze and facilitate the development of the rhizome that will indirectly drive learning toward the desired direction.¹¹ (p. 3)

When the educator starts a rhizome with the students at the beginning of the academic year, they elaboratively inform the students about this new student-centred teaching method and then relate to the students in which direction the 'curriculum' for that specific class is heading, whereupon they request the students to do some research and post their suggestions and interests about that specific subject on the platform. Having read all the information on the posts afterwards, the educator then summarises it under specific headings or themes and posts it on the platform as a starting point for the discussions and research for the year or semester. Henceforth, they only act as a guide to assist and advise the students (when necessary or requested) in their research on these themes (and more if they want to) and collaboration with each other.

The educator should therefore act as an interactive guide, learning together with the students, becoming more knowledgeable about the subject under discussion, so that in the end, both the students and the educator have more insight in the subject than the educator had at the beginning of the course. It is thus imperative for the educator to approach their subject from a student-centred, didactic, pedagogical and organisational perspective during the cause of the year or semester (Mortensen 2014).

For the educator who would be startled by all the information, dissemination of knowledge, a flurry of good and bad arguments and overwhelming reactions of students in the rhizome, the words of Cronjé (2023) ring true:

For rhizomatic learning the multiple becomes the unit. There are multiple ways of knowing. There are multiple knowledges. There are multiple perspectives. There are multiple pedagogies ... It is therefore necessary to design for the multiple as if it is a unit. (n.p.)

The moment these facts make sense to the educator, it would be easier to comprehend the platform, its environment and the actions taking place in that space.

It is recommended that every educator presenting a specific Theology subject should not only have their own rhizome for their subject but also should be able link it to the other rhizomes with knowledge acquiring and sharing and even to rhizomes of other subjects outside Theology if needed. Each

11.This is much in line with what Maturana and Varela call 'autopoiesis' (Maturana & Varela 1972).

rhizome forms an interconnection between the students, educators, gaming (cf. Oliver 2024), AI and literature, taking the 'planned curriculum' to unexpected heights and in unexpected directions. This is called 'open networked learning', creating 'networked learning communities' (Pan & Chen 2023), called 'multiplicities' by Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2005:8). In this network, the students are both autonomous and interdependent, creating a personal learning network for themselves as they like it, linking it to their community of students and also to the 'chaotic external environment of available learning resources and potential pathways' (Brailas 2023:5). The 'interdependent and collective nature of collaboration' encourages the participants' agency (Newell & Bain 2018:62), their sense of responsibility for the part they play in the rhizome and assigned accountability (Joubin 2023:225). A significant advantage of these rhizomes is that communication can take place on an asynchronous level where the participants are communicating to each other *via* the platform or a synchronous level where they have a direct conversation with each other on the platform (Mortensen 2014).

This kind of cooperative learning sounds like a good space for an individual to just sit back and see how others do the research for them. However, it is the job of the educator to ensure that every 'node' in this rhizome constantly makes a significant and thoughtful contribution. The individual can therefore never dissolve in the group, but constantly has to participate by disseminating useful knowledge and personal arguments in order to contribute to the 'collective intelligence mindset' (Brailas 2020:8). In this way, each student will maximally empower themselves as an individual within the group and therefore retain their personal agency and creativity (cf. Brailas 2020:10).

With all the above in mind, it becomes obvious that in rhizomatic education the 'in-person' classroom is (almost) fully replaced by online education – a sort of 'flipped classroom' without the in-person classroom – where the students and educator(s) have a constant flow of knowledge and conversation, creating space for higher-order thinking activities (Ibnus 2022:111). Top-down is replaced by bottom-up, traditional is replaced by 'disruptive' (student centred), and the transferral of information is replaced by the sharing and discussion thereof. Added to these, the confines of the classroom are replaced by 'the world', as any element of society, culture, tradition, creativity, AI, entertainment or gaming can form part of the rhizome to contribute to the overall sharing of knowledge.

Where and how do large language models like ChatGPT fit into rhizomatic education?

When requested, Google Scholar produces a myriad of articles on the use of ChatGPT and other LLMs in the higher education environment, participating in the contemporary debate on the advantages and risks of these chatbots. Fact is that nowadays education and technology are interrelated, influencing each other (Firaina & Sulisworo 2023:39); fact is also that this interrelation can now be taken to the next level

by using LLMs such as ChatGPT. This is a good reason why the Faculty of Theology should utilise it proactively as well as ethically, taking note of both its advantages and risks or challenges, together with rhizomatic learning so as to make it part of the 'set curriculum' (Dempere et al. 2023:1).

As an LLM, ChatGPT is an AI-powered natural language processing conversational chatbot, which was released by OpenAI on 30 November 2022 (Dempere et al. 2023:1 of 13; Rudolph, Tan & Tan 2023:344; Tajik & Tajik 2023:1). This LLM assists the consumer 'in writing, learning, solving assessments and could do so in a conversational way' (Strzelecki 2023:1). Additionally, this AI dialogue-based tool generates human-like responses to human stimuli (Rudolph et al. 2023:344). It operates in different languages such as English, French, German and Spanish, being able to produce both standard and colloquial language. Its main operations are the translation or summary of texts, the generation of content, the creation of codes, responding quickly to questions and the composition of a story, play or an essay (Tajik & Tajik 2023:1).

ChatGPT is a 'large-scale neural network [*model*] that [*has*] been pre-trained using enormous datasets that include text taken from the [*I*]nternet. [*It has also been pretrained to utilise the*] [*n*]uances of language, grammar, context, and even a certain amount of common-sense reasoning' (Aithal & Aithal 2023:176). It can enhance learning and teach students by example how to think and write critically. It is therefore 'a valuable tool in innovative and inclusive teaching, learning, and assessment that aligns with a transformative relationship with knowledge' (Strzelecki 2023:1; cf. also Fauzi et al. 2023:14886). This chatbot is created for students, educators and administrative tasks and can facilitate collaboration between students mutually and their educator (Fauzi et al. 2023:14888).

Rasul et al. (2023:1) have identified five benefits of ChatGPT:

- It can facilitate adaptive learning.
- It can provide personalised feedback.
- It has the potential to support research and data analysis.
- It can offer automated administrative services.
- It has the potential to support the educator to develop innovative assessments. It also assists the students in taking note of the way in which assessments, if any, can take place.

These benefits can be readily used within the rhizome, especially on an initial research level. It is very important to check every source being used by ChatGPT to make sure that the citations are correct. This brings us to the challenges of the chatbot. As the advantages are many, there are also challenges, specifically if not used responsibly. Rasul et al. (2023) indicate at least four challenges:¹² Ethical and equity considerations, maintaining academic integrity, potential bias and falsified information in the information processing,

¹²They actually add a fifth one, namely 'assessing students' learning outcomes' (Rasul et al. 2023:9), which is not added here, as the author does not agree with it.

and the evaluation of graduate skill sets. These will be discussed cursorily below.

It is not ethical or equitable to use ChatGPT without referencing it or even co-authoring it for a piece of work performed (Rasul et al. 2023:7). In this way, the student learns how to maintain academic integrity, especially when writing articles or assignments or even a dissertation or thesis (Rasul et al. 2023:8). It is important to remember that ChatGPT gives information as it has received it, be it biased or even false. Therefore, the student must check all the information received from the chatbot (Rasul et al. 2023:8). As chatbots are not designed to evaluate or assess graduate skill sets such as critical thinking and problem solving, leadership, global and cultural awareness, ethics and professionalism (Rasul et al. 2023:9), it should not be used to perform these functions.

Theology rhizomes

Many educators understandably have an 'inner luddite' – a natural resistance – towards new intelligent technologies and new ways of educating students (MacGregor 2023). This article is, therefore, in light of the discussion above, an appeal to educators to abandon their comfort zones and explore the mentioned 'challenges' of the new era(s) in which we live.

The initial phase

For an educator to start with a rhizome for their students could be just as difficult as creating a serious educational game (cf. Oliver 2024). Therefore, it is highly recommended that the educators of the Faculty of Theology at a specific university first start with their own collective (professional) rhizome to get acquainted with it and to experience the advantages of the platform that they are using together with the other educators. This rhizome is called a 'community of practice' (CoP) (Caldwell et al. 2023:1) and would serve as a good introduction to familiarise oneself with this new concept.

A suggested platform that would fit well within a rhizome is Discord (discord.com) because of the following reasons:

- The platform is for free.
- It works much like Microsoft Teams but with additional options of communication.
- Video calls can be made instantly and group video sessions can be joined by simply joining a voice channel on a dedicated server.
- File transfers are quick and easy and can be posted on a channel to be downloaded by members of the platform.
- One can assign different roles to users within the platform, each with specific restrictions for access to certain channels, control over specific elements within the platform and editing privileges for channels and the platform.
- Within a dedicated channel, there can be multiple text, voice and video channels for specific subjects and roles within the platform.

- It operates on any device with full functionality, not just on computers like many other platforms.

'Me and my students'

The rhizome developed by the educator for them and their students must become a network society (Castells 1996), embracing the multiplicity of teaching and learning (Dillon 2016:90). It must be an inter-connected theological village where every participant can feel at home, while they are working towards obtaining maximum knowledge and insight in the shortest time (Brailas 2023:2).

Although Theology could be regarded as a set course, not one of the subjects of this field of study has been mined or researched to its bottom. Regarding Theology, in most cases, there is no such thing as a final answer (not even in Church History), making the entire field open for intense debate. The more debate takes place, the better for Theology and the understanding and interpretation thereof by the students (and even educators). Because no dogma or argument in Theology is set in stone, there needs to be more discussions and further research in order to establish more comprehension. A rhizome is the ideal place, as everybody could be on the platform for as long as they want to be, discussing subjects or arguing on an asynchronous or synchronous level. No classroom is needed for this.

The educator who guides the communication should make sure, in an 'unbiased' way, that the arguments and addition of information concerning the subject under discussion move in a good direction and are constructive. If not, they have to intervene in a well-mannered way and inform the students why they are not being productive at that stage. Student should be taught how to argue and debate without getting personal or trying to overwhelm the others. This will keep the rhizome healthy to the core. In this way academia is cultivating proper pastors and academics.

Assessment can happen by way of a portfolio of evidence or as it is done at this stage, mostly through an oral examination with groups of students. During the latter, it is highly recommended to put a controversial topic on the table and ask every participant to first respond to it and then to discuss it with each other, once again, without the one student overwhelming the rest.

'Me and my fellow nodes'

For the alumni (who were part of a rhizome at the university), it is also suggested to create a new rhizome for their group or link to an existing rhizome, being used to 'non-classroom teaching' and collaborating with fellow students. They should continue with their 'rhizoactivity' in their lifelong and lifewide learning process. Kang (2007:216) puts it this way: 'The image of a [*meta*]modern learner, who is a nonunitary being that has multiple subjectivities, cannot be singular', thus clearly indicating that the group is better and more productive than the individual.

The question here is all about the content of this lifelong and lifewide learning process. There is, however, a few differences between the alumni and the students:

- The alumni will not be assessed, either by examinations or by portfolios.
- They will participate on a voluntary basis although it is highly recommended that they participate regularly or constantly.
- Groups of alumni can decide on a theme, a topic or piece of research that they want to discuss with each other.
- They can also post their sermons or other work on the platform and discuss or debate it with each other.

It would be good for the educators at any Faculty of Theology to take note of all the Theology rhizomes and to engage with them at times. This will keep the relationship between the alumni and their educators (and for that matter, their faculty) on a healthy level and will also give the alumni the opportunity to ask questions and to take note of the most recent research performed on a specific subject.

Conclusion

Higher education in South Africa, maybe worldwide, and specifically in Theology in South Africa, needs HEROEs or recently minded educators. These pioneering educators should take the lead in a new way of education and learning in this country. Educators, covering all the levels of education, need to stand up and acknowledge the fact that this is almost the end of the first quarter of the 21st century of the common era, and they need to respond to that in the appropriate innovative and 'disruptive' way by teaching the students at universities accordingly. Obviously, this is no small task and is not going to happen overnight.

Maybe the educators of a Theology Faculty need to first found their own rhizome to motivate and inform each other about available technologies and information, specifically AI and serious games, and how to collaborate with students in a rhizome. Lifelong and lifewide learning are key to this action. They must first get used to this new way of teaching and then apply it to their subjects in a fluid and interactive way before they approach their students with it. With the concepts of lifelong and lifewide learning in mind, students should be taught to love the entire learning process, to take ownership of it and to convincingly make a decision to never stop with their rhizome(s).

When the educators start with this venture, the eras of the 4IR, Education 4.0, Learning 3.0 and Web 3.0 will sooner become a reality in academia and elsewhere. In this way, they will divorce themselves from the traditional outdated teaching and learning processes, which still form part of higher education in South Africa. This will also help the educators in our country to be more in rapport with their students and mutually and will take them to new heights in their own research.

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Data availability

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