MON: Can MOOCs propel the OER agenda for educators in South Africa? (John Kerr)

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John Kerr
6 January 2016

Can MOOCs propel the OER agenda for educators in South Africa?

This project focuses on the amalgamation of the two entities – MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses) and OERs (Open Educational Resources) – to ascertain if a symbiotic relationship could organically occur between the two. The aim is the impact that the globalised distribution of free, high quality educational technology resources - blended into MOOC pedagogy - can have a direct impact on teachers of technology in South Africa to locate suitable OERs and understand how to adapt them to their cultural sensitivities; a common issue with global north materials (Waliji, 2014).

Wright (2014) identifies the top five barriers to education across the World as: Power, Internet connectivity, Training, Value teachers and Sustainability. Education in South Africa suffers these barriers which directly impact on learning and teaching; more specifically, how to locate and use OERs (de los Arcos *et al,* 2014). However, as Waliji (2014) identifies OER initiatives in the south are increasing as hardware, access to digital tool and connectivity grows.

Through the distribution of open material as MOOCs – adopting cMOOC pedagogy of connectivism – this project aims to break down some of these barriers and increase access to South African educationalists.

 MOOCs have proven to be a truly disruptive innovation for Higher Education. They continue to increase exponentially in numbers year on year, with more than 400 institutions globally delivering free courses to a registered cohort of 18million students across all major MOOC providers (Class-Central, 2014). In contrast, OERs have been on institutional agendas for the last decade but haven't yet made a comparable impact. However, things are changing. Weller (2013) notes the blurring of MOOCs and OERs and Abeywardena (2014) emphasises that OERs are not as of yet a significant part of the movement of open education. De los Arcos *et al* (2014) OER Research Hub Evidence Report on OER adoption highlights that 79.5% of educators use OERs to gain new ideas and that 27.5% agree that OER use results in better test scores. However, only 12.4% educators publish OERs under a Creative Commons license and that sourcing OERs is the biggest barriers to their use. This project aims to provide a solution to this problem with the outlined context.

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Similarly to the OER movement in Scotland being guided by the Open Scotland Declaration, Africa has OER Africa; a movement which supports institutions locate and find OERs (OER Africa, 2013). Recently, the United States the Federal Government released support for OERs to provide equitable access to quality education, OER creation, adoption and sharing (openscot.net). All three movements follow on from the 2012 Paris OER Declaration which designated that –

> "Teaching, learning and research materials in any medium…that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open licence that permits no-cost access, use, adoption and redistribution by others…"

This project will also consider key benefits and potential risks to institutions and their staff while outlining potential enhancements to the wider community, and the socioeconomical benefits this approach could bring.

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Anna Orridge
4:40pm 18 January 2016 Permalink

Hi John, I touched on the subject of OERs and their potential in the developing world. One key problem we explored was the lack of infrastructure (no broadband, or lack of access to appropriate technology). I've also read that OERs and MOOCs have, at least up until this point in time, tended to be used disproportionately by the already well-educated and affluent. This seems strange, considering the fact that the resources are free and available to all. Do you think this is just a case of awareness? I find what you say about cultural sensitivities interesting. Will we find out more about the issues specific to South Africa, or some more general points. I'm doing a MOOC at the moment on Animation. Really enjoying it, but I do miss that sense of community you get on a more traditional blended learning course.

John Kerr

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Hi Anna,

Awareness is an issue, but lack of infrastructure appears time after time in the research as a major barrier to open education. I hope with this approach, academics in SA can locate material quickly and easier allowing them to share the best open objects with their learners and have the ability to adapt and remix the content to suit.

The community of practice MOOCs can offer will also help foster new ideas of how technology can be successfully implemented allowing academics access to a supported network of peers as they work through the content,

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Wendy Maples
2:35pm 5 February 2016 Permalink

Hi John,

I have a friend who works on a schools project in the Tuame Valley school district and her main concern is with the poor training and support that teachers get and which means that even when children have access to education, the experience is often poor. Her project involves having volunteer teachers - mainly from the UK - run 'summer' schools, with local teachers, with a focus on a particular issue or topic (music, health ed, etc). This is all face to face. However, she (along with many others of course) has noted the use of mobile technologies is changing the access students and teachers have to online resources. All good. But the problem remains that teachers are not in a good position to make best use of these resources, nor to support kids in making best use.

When I was supporting staff devlopment of at-a-distance tutors, a key point that repeatedly arose is that much of excellent online teaching is directly related to good teaching practice more generally, but, that for many teachers, digital literacy (or lack thereof) felt like a major impediment, when actually the issue was more to do with understanding good practice in the first place (please note I am overstating this). While you are specifically looking at teachers of technology (and I am guessing you mean computer technology?) so I suppose digitial literacy is less of an issue, I wonder if good teaching practice more generally is an additional variable that needs to be considered?

As I have mentioned before, there are overlaps here with my project on MOOCs use in the University of the 3rd Age. :)

Dr Simon Ball
11:19am 16 February 2016 Permalink

Hi John

Here is a summary of the questions/comments from your presentation - please respond as you wish:

> presumably the material that is avaiable is N.Am-Eruo-centric?
  Intresting re YouTube as main source -- is that Uni channels, or much more random??

- I guess that internet access is the key - but that comes with a cost.
- I really like your approach John - if you can't beat them (MOOCs), join them by making a MOOC on OERs - brilliant
- Yes, MOOCs are 'OERs' once they are disagregated. Nice!
- Would a MOOC normally come with a tutor or would it be a matter of self-motivation alone?
- Hi John - great presentation. At the Univ of Cape Town we are producing MOOCs with open licences on FutureLearn and Coursera, and this is our own material from the Global South. See http://www.cilt.uct.ac.za/cilt/moocs-uct [John this comment was made by a former H818 student who offered to get in touch with you to discuss further if you wish, just let me know if you would like her email address]

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