Chapter 7

Learning Objects in MOOC: Good Practice for Learning Objects

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ABSTRACT

Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) are still in their infancy on the surface they look like the necessary silver bullet to provide alternate pathways to education. However, when completion rates and retention figures were published in 2013 the whole concept of the MOOC came under criticism. This criticism has grown largely as a result of the uncertainty and lack of detail about what a MOOC actually is; yet there appears to be a global drive behind MOOC. The ubiquitous presence of technology may be seen as a change agent and there is arguably sufficient demand for a new delivery model to provide education to a modern market. MOOC could fulfil this requirement for an alternate model. Central to the success of MOOC is the availability of high quality learning objects or Open Educational resources (OERs). This chapter provides a background to learning objects and MOOC and looks at good practices in the design, development and management of learning objects in MOOC.

BACKGROUND TO LEARNING OBJECTS AND MOOC

Technology is a change agent in education. Mobile devices have revolutionised education and MOOC have developed as the physical learning environment has changed dramatically over the last decade. Cornier and Alexander coined the term MOOC in 2008 and the definition of MOOC is constantly evolving. Arguably without OERs we could not have seen such an explosion of MOOC. Sir John Daniel has served as President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning from 2004 to 2012 and is recognised by many as a key contributor to the literature for open learning. Daniel and Uvalić-Trumbić (2014) identify learning objects, specifically OERs, as the “long fuse that detonated the MOOC explosion”. Quite simply without learning objects we would not have MOOC. The period 2008-2012 has seen a sharp rise of the MOOC and 2012 was seen as the year of the MOOC (Pappano, 2012; Mangan, 2012) and 2013/2014

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has seen much less fervour surrounding the MOOC concept as attrition has come into sharper focus (Martin, 2013). However, MOOC have established a foothold in the education ecosystem and it is not possible to ignore their potential contribution to global education particularly in the developing world (Christensen, 2013). MOOC tend to be offered by universities in partnership with providers such as Coursera, and Udacity. According to Hew and Cheung (2014) one of the fastest growing MOOC providers is Coursera which has more than 30 university partners including Princeton, Brown, Columbia, Duke, Stanford, and Johns Hopkins, and has registered 2.8 million students and there are in the region of 1.4 million course enrolments every month.

In order to look at the international drive to promote MOOCs there are a number of issues to address. These include:

- Who is driving the initiatives for MOOC?
- Why this agenda is being promoted?
- How does this agenda manifest itself in national policy and initiatives?

According to Breslow et al (2013) some of the primary reasons why students enrol in MOOC is the desire to learn about a new topic or to extend current knowledge, curiosity about MOOCs, for a personal challenge, and the desire to collect as many certificates as possible. The findings from a survey on Student Perspective conducted by Belanger and Thornton (2013), which had some 3,576 respondents, also found that many had enrolled on a MOOC in order to extend their current knowledge. Looking at many of the international initiatives to engage with MOOC it would seem that MOOC may be seen as a “quick fix” to address access to education and acquisition of skills such as problem solving and digital literacy. The European Commission Education and Culture produced a report in 2004 on Innovative Learning Environments in School Education. The findings of this report highlight that the integration of ICT has been identified by key stakeholders as a priority: “there is a strong public involvement in promoting the integration of ICT in learning in the school environment. This means that even where the integration of ICT in schools is not yet underway, it is a major goal which is jointly recognised as representing a priority need among both central and local government politicians, school administrators, school management, teachers, parents and pupils” (European Commission, 2004, p 13). There is a global recognition at government level that there is a need for new literacies and many governments around the world are looking to reform their educational systems to prepare students for the 21st century. Often, these reforms incorporate ICT and attempt to connect education change with economic growth and social development. Leading international figures are calling for educational reform to educate and equip students with the essential skills for a modern world (e.g. Obama, 2009). MOOC in particular are seen as a means to provide students with these skills.

The skills of many workers do not match the demands of the job market and the gap is widening. There are 200 million unemployed people around the world, 75 million of whom are youths, and many lack rudimentary workplace skills - the ability to use a computer, make a budget, communicate in an office environment (Bornstein, 2012). Bornstein cites the 2012 study published by the McKinsey Global Institute which states that by 2020, the world will have a surplus of up to 95 million low-skill workers and a shortage of up to 40 million college graduates. MOOC could potentially assist in closing this gap. In many developing regions of the world mobile devices are the dominant means of accessing the internet (Whitesides, 2013, Ling and Donner, 2013). This would indicate that there is a great potential for MOOC in these regions (Stormquist, 2014). There is also an ongoing shift towards ubiquitous learning,