Designing Meaningful Learning Environments in a Work–Integrated–Learning Course Using a DOCC Design

Kathy Jordan
RMIT University, Australia

Jennifer Elsden-Clifton
RMIT University, Australia

ABSTRACT

As Higher Education increasingly moving towards a plethora of blended and fully online learning, questions are raised around the space and place of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). This chapter reports on one institution’s efforts to design and deliver a WIL course in a Teacher Education program adopting an open and distributed framework. The redesigned course, Orientation to Teaching, was a first year course in a Bachelor of Education (Primary) program at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. The redesign of the course was underpinned by a Distributed Open Collaborative Course (DOCC) design and as the workplace also became the site of learning, the theory of effective WIL curriculum (Orrell, 2011) also informed the design. This chapter examines the complexity of DOCC design in WIL contexts and uses Khan’s 8 dimensions to frame the discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Where once online learning was the exception and the domain of distance education and open learning, it is fast becoming the norm within higher education as institutions seek to design and deliver courses that meet the needs of their learners. This rapid growth has been aided by the development of educational technologies that enable courses to be more readily delivered through Learning Management Systems (LMS) and an accompanying suite of computer applications. There has also been a proliferation of online...
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Learning environments including fully online courses, blended courses that provide “the best of both” (Young, 2002), and variations of open and distributed courses such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

The history of MOOCs stems from the Open Education Resources (OER) movement of the late 1990s, the term MOOC being coined by Dave Cormier in 2008 (Reilly, 2013). More recently, the New York Times declared 2012 ‘The Year of the MOOC’ (Reilly, 2013). Since their beginnings, MOOCs have continued to evolve, and De Coutere (2014) laments that there is now an “alphabet soup of acronyms” including “mini-MOOC, BOOC (big open online course), MOOD (massive open online discussion), SMOC (synchronous massive online course), SPOC (small private online courses), and ROOC (regional open online course)” (p. 22). Large, commercially developed courses, delivered through companies such as Coursera, are now often referred to as xMOOCs, while those that involve more student-generated content using connectivist pedagogy are referred to as cMOOCs (the ‘c’ standing for connectivist). Another recent development has been the Distributed Open Collaborative Course (DOCC) in which expertise is distributed across the membership of the course and content is appropriated and adapted by the users (students and teachers) to suit their own learning context (Juhasz & Balsamo, 2012).

One of the main reasons MOOCs have gained such attention is due to their capacity to seemingly provide open access to “all”, including those that traditionally do not attend tertiary education institutions or those who would otherwise not have the opportunity. MOOCs are also perceived as simple, without large outlay and are designed to teach an infinite number of learners (Baggaley, 2013; Khalil & Ebner, 2013). The research around MOOCs has raised a number of issues, as Reilly (2013) suggests, “the MOOC learning environment presents unique challenges to course design, delivery and pedagogy” (p. 1309). While having large enrolments, MOOCs have very low completion rates, as well as low learner engagement and low levels of interaction between the learner and instructor (Khalil & Ebner, 2013). Many of these issues arise because MOOCs are underpinned by the assumption that learners are autonomous and self-motivated and there is little capacity in the MOOC platforms for teacher feedback. There has also been concerns around the assumption of access for “all” as MOOCs still require internet access and English language proficiency. There are also significant concerns around accreditation (intellectual property, cheating, licensing and credentialing) that have yet to be resolved.

As Higher Education continues to develop online learning environments, and favours the open and distributed design and delivery of courses such as MOOCs, cMOOCs and DOCCs, the question of where this leaves Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) courses becomes pertinent. WIL courses are those in which the workplace becomes a site of learning, and which aim to improve employability and assist in the transition from university to work (Brimble & Freudenberg, 2010). In countries such as Australia, WIL is becoming increasingly important in universities as governments see it as a means to prepare a future workforce for a changing economy. Therefore, this research seeks to explore the questions “How can we design and deliver an effective WIL learning environment?” What principles should frame our decision-making? What might a WIL course look like within an online, open, and distributed model? What can we learn from such a redesign?

This chapter provides a case study of one institution’s efforts to design and deliver a WIL course in a Teacher Education context that adopts an open and distributed framework. The course, Orientation to Teaching, is a first year course in a four year Bachelor of Education Program, at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. The course redesign was informed by the design features of a DOCC alongside effective WIL principles and Khan’s 8 dimensional e-learning framework.
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