# FLAN London: 22 June 2018

The theme of the FutureLearn Academic Network’s meeting in London last week was ‘New Research Directions’. This was our annual opportunity to catch up on the work of the many doctoral students who spend their lives researching aspects of FutureLearn.

Keynote speaker Alyssa Wise, from New York University, encouraged FLAN members to pool ideas and research, identify overarching concepts, and develop a framework that can be used to structure research into learning at scale. She asked two questions: What are the MOOC learning outcomes that are valuable, and that are valued? What are the unique qualities, the core characteristics, of MOOCS?

Alyssa identified massive scale as one of these core characteristics. Massive scale brings its own opportunities, challenges, interactions and pedagogies – all of which need to be investigated. At the same time, it’s also important to look at the smaller elements that make up the massive, taking opportunities to examine what is happening at a smaller scale, and exploring the diversity that is another core characteristic of MOOCs.

Several speakers focused on what we can tell about learning and teaching by analysing discussion threads. Alyssa talked about her work on the MOOCeology project. which looks at how people interact in large-scale learning environments. Her team are currently working on ways of telling automatically whether an online discussion is focused on course content. They’re also using network analysis to study content-related discussion networks. The people in these networks interact with each other, they keep engaging, and they keep the discussions going. Alyssa suggested that how people engage in content-related discussion could be one of the most important indicators of their learning.

Apart from teaching, learning and discussion, the other main focus of the day was on diversity and accessibility. Janesh Sanzgiri compared the experience of Indian learners on FutureLearn and on the Indian MOOC platform NPTEL. Shahrzad Ardavani and Monty King examined a MOOC-based CPD course for English Language teachers from different perspectives, including the perspective of learners in East Timor. Francisco Iniesto looked at the motivations of FutureLearn’s disabled learners, as well as the barriers they have to overcome. Each of these speakers identified ways in which FutureLearn could be made more accessible and inclusive.

The next meeting of the FutureLearn Academic Network will be in Glasgow on Friday 7 September and the theme will be ‘Conversational learning’. If you’d like to attend, either in person or remotely, please contact flan@futurelearn.com

Link to Alyssa’s profile page

<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/faculty/Alyssa_Wise>

Link to overview of mooceology

http://create.nyu.edu/wordpress/?page\_id=2570