

**FutureLearn Academic Network meeting:  
New research directions**

**Hosts:** The Open University and FutureLearn

**Date:** Friday 22 June 2018

**Time:** 09:30 – 16:45 (followed by optional events for those attending in person)

**Venue:** 1-11 Hawley Crescent, Camden Town, London NW1 8NP

The event will be live web streamed for those who cannot attend in person

**Event hashtag:** #OUFLAN

All times are in British Summer Time (BST).

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| 09:30 | Registration and Refreshments | |
| 10:00 | Professor Eileen Scanlon and  Dr Rebecca Ferguson, The Open University | Welcome and opening remarks |
| 10:15 | Dr Alyssa Friend Wise, Associate Professor of Learning Sciences & Educational Technology, NYU Steinhardt, USA | The conceptual and methodological future of large scale learning research |
| 11:15 | Refreshments |  |
| 11:30 | Fereshte Goshtasbpour, University of Leeds | Educators’ participation in MOOC discussions and learners’ engagement: what do free-flowing discussions tell us? |
| 11:55 | Tim O'Riordan , University of Southampton | Classifying critical thinking in MOOCs |
| 12:20 | Tina Papathoma, The Open University | Who teaches in massive open online courses and how do they learn to do this? A multi-case study |
| 12:45 | Lunch | |
| 13:45 | Janesh Sanzgiri, The Open University | Comparison of Indian learner experiences on FutureLearn and an Indian MOOC platform (NPTEL) |
| 14:10 | Shahrzad Ardavani, University of Aberdeen  Monty King, The University of Western Australia | Examining a MOOC-based CPD course for English Language teachers from two differing perspectives |
| 14:35 | Francisco Iniesto, The Open University | Understanding MOOC disabled learners: motivations and barriers to learning |

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| 15:00 | Refreshments | |
| 15:15 | Dr Terry O’Sullivan, The Open University | Different routes to skills development in MOOCs |
| 15:40 | Garron Hillaire, The Open University | Sentiment analysis in MOOC/online learning: review of accuracy and a prospective method |
| 16:05 | Nigel Smith, FutureLearn | Planning for the future |
| 16:30 | Professor Eileen Scanlon,  The Open University | Closing remarks, leading into… |
| 16:45 | FutureLearn team | Tour of FutureLearn offices, optional |
| 17:45 | Tour ends |  |
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| 18:30 | For those who have booked in advance, dinner at <http://www.lazcamden.com/>  (please note, you will be expected to pay your share of the bill) | |

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| **Keynote: Alyssa Friend Wise, New York University**  **The conceptual and methodological future of large scale learning research** |

**Examining a MOOC-based continuing professional development (CPD) course for English Language teachers from two differing perspectives.**

**Shahrzad Ardavani, University of Aberdeen**

**Monty King, The University of Western Australia**

This presentation draws on the work of two PhD projects investigating the potential for FutureLearn courses to provide continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to English language teachers in diverse contexts. The first uses Brookfield Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) and Activity Theory to capture the experiences of six learners on the British Council’s *Teaching for Success: Learning and Learners*. The participants are from six different cultural and racial groups who face some moments of disconnection from the course because they bring different expectations and assumptions based on their prior educational background.

The second is based on a participatory action research project involving seven learners working in a language school in Dili, Timor-Leste, who participated in a different course from the British Council series, *Teaching for Success: The Classroom and the World*. While using different qualitative approaches to explore the lived experience of learners on these courses, the presenters draw some similar conclusions, including the need for sufficient scaffolding to support learners as they progress through the courses.

**Educators’ participation in MOOC discussions and learners’ engagement: What do free-flowing discussions tell us?**

**Fereshte Goshtasbpour, University of Leeds**

Central to MOOC pedagogy are interactions between learners, and learners and educators, which mainly occur in discussion part of the course. These discussions serve a variety of purposes such as facilitating learners’ understanding of the content or enabling access to multiple views and are attended by both learners and educators. However, it is not clear to what extent and in what ways learners engage with the educators’ contributions to discussions.

To examine learners’ engagement with educators’ contributions, 818 conversations between lead educators, educators, mentors, and learners of three FutureLearn MOOCs are analysed and the type, level and social dimension of the educators’ postings are examined. Then their comments are studied for learners’ explicit (responding), implicit (liking) and non-engagement.

This short presentation will report on the findings from the analysis of learner-educators conversations in discussions and will explore the relationship between the content educators’ posts and learners’ engagement.

**Sentiment analysis in MOOC/online learning: review of accuracy and a prospective method**

**Garron Hillaire, The Open University**

One of the emerging technologies for emotion detection in online learning is sentiment analysis. Some use SA for descriptive purposes, while others use SA for predictive purposes. Whether the technology is used for predictive or descriptive reasons, there is reason to consider the accuracy of the measure. Accuracy can only be benchmarked after determining if emotion is something that is observed by a scientist or experienced by a student. I will review accuracy of studies that take both perspectives and illustrate the crowd sourcing approach from my thesis.

**Understanding MOOC disabled learners: motivations and barriers to learning**

**Francisco Iniesto, The Open University**

A useful open eLearning environment should consider the target learner’s abilities, learning goals, where learning takes place, and which specific devices the learner uses. MOOC platforms struggle to take these factors into account and typically are not accessible, inhibiting access to environments that are intended to be open to all. There is limited research to understand disabled learners’ motivations while participating in MOOCs and the barriers to learning they find while taking part in them.

This presentation outlines a study to analyse semi-structured interviews with a set of fifteen disabled MOOC learners and existing pre- and post-survey data from fourteen MOOCs offered by The Open University at FutureLearn. The mixed method study reported in this presentation is part of a broader PhD research programme to investigate the current accessibility of MOOCs, the processes through which this accessibility is achieved, and the potential use of data to improve MOOC accessibility.

**Classifying critical thinking in MOOCS**

**Tim O’Riordan, University of Southampton**

Supporting learners is a critical part of MOOC moderators’ work, and identifying learners’ critical thinking is an important part of this process. As many thousands of learners may engage with comment forums, providing support in this environment is a significant challenge for the small numbers of moderators typically engaged in this work. To address this, I report on three studies I have undertaken which seek to determine the reliability of established coding schemes used for pedagogical content analysis of online discussions, establishing associations with these schemes and linguistic and other indicators of critical thinking. I develop a simple computational method of classification, and evaluate an interview-based case study, where this method is applied to an on-going MOOC. The method achieved good reliability when applied to a test data set, and when applied to comments in a live MOOC and evaluated by MOOC moderators, it was considered to have provided useful, actionable feedback.

**Different routes to skills development in MOOCs**

**Terry O’Sullivan, The Open University**

Cinque (2017) reports work on specifying ‘soft skills’ and ‘digital soft skills’ with recommendations for their development in MOOCs from the eLene4work.eu project, acknowledging the challenges skills development presents for online. My paper presents early thoughts on skills development in a FutureLearn MOOC in the OU *Business and Finance Fundamentals* program compared with approaches to similar skills via Google Digital Garage.

**Reference:** Cinque M. (2017), MOOCs and Soft skills: a comparison of different courses on Creativity, Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society, v.13, n.3, 83-96. ISSN: 1826-6223, e-ISSN:1971-8829 DOI: 10.20368/1971-8829/1386

**Who teaches in massive open online courses and how do they learn to do this? A multi-case study**

**Tina Papathoma, The Open University**

In an effort of Higher Education (HE) institutions to find ways to improve student satisfaction and gain income, they invest in digital innovation and opportunities provided by web and mobile technologies. This results in a changing landscape in HE with the development of massive open online courses (MOOCs). Hence, this change also creates new demands for professionals in HE. This study answers the following research question: Who teaches in MOOCs and how do they learn to do this? Therefore, this study examined the profiles of educators as ‘teachers’ in massive open online courses and their activities. Moreover, as the MOOC environment is relatively new for educators, this research also considered how educators learn to teach these courses and what the processes that they build their knowledge are. To do this, it utilised aspects of Tynjälä’s Integrative Pedagogy model that bring together elements of professional expertise and framed the analysis of this research by revamping/enriching the model. To this end, a multiple case study was conducted, with a focus on educators’ learning during MOOC development as well as on the processes and tools they employed to build their knowledge. The data comprised 28 interviews with educators involved in seven MOOCs of History and of Politics in the FutureLearn platform. The analysis examined the seven cases, considering the different aspects of MOOC development.

The evidence shows that people who teach in MOOCs are not only the Educators that appear in the main page of a FL MOOC but also the Learning Designers and the Mentors and that their job titles do not actually reflect their roles. Also, the abundance of ‘titles’ that participants used about their roles demand a reconsideration of the current ones. The introduction of a more generic title of the people involved in the MOOC teaching as ‘MOOC educators’ is more useful. The data also indicate that activities of MOOC educators varied and ranged from securing funding for MOOC development, designing the course, writing MOOC content to purchasing material for the course, filming and editing videos, creating the MOOC on the platform, facilitating and repurposing the MOOC.

Drawing on this evidence, this study offers a new conceptualisation of who the educators of MOOCs are by considering their activities in the MOOC environment which is different from face-to-face and formal online environments. The study also highlights the importance of team work where professionals bring various genres of expertise through which they build knowledge via sociocultural means. The processes MOOC educators build knowledge involved explication, problem solving, reflection and evaluation, collaboration in authoring and collaboration in facilitating as well as dealing with uncertainty.

Cases in which teams of people with relative expertise in the aforementioned activities, systematically collaborated on MOOC development tended to build knowledge more successfully than cases that people did not work together. Teams who collaborated using tools synchronously, that offer transparency on MOOC authoring and on facilitating it, were inclined to work more effectively than cases who did not use such tools. However, even the cases that did not work in organised teams to build knowledge in the previous ways, did so by problem solving and by reflecting and evaluating on their activities or by dealing with uncertainty. The study concludes by proposing best practices for MOOC development for educators and institutions to guide and support future MOOC processes and has implications for practice and professional development.

**Comparison of Indian learner experiences on FutureLearn and an Indian MOOC platform (NPTEL)**

**Janesh Sanzgiri, The Open University**

As research on massive open online courses matures, evidence suggests MOOCs are deepening rather than widening access to education. Despite this, MOOCs are still being positioned as disruptors to struggling higher education systems in the Global South. This presentation will cover the findings of a study of Indian MOOC learners, comparing their learning on a Global MOOC platform (FutureLearn) and an Indian MOOC platform (NPTEL), to see what differences, if any, exist in their overall learning experience. The study identified marked differences in the demographics and motivations of learners, and also highlighted the distinct role both FutureLearn and NPTEL play in the Indian context. Along with a discussion of the key themes emerging from this study, this presentation will also offer recommendations to FutureLearn on how to better tailor their offerings to Indian learners.