

Emergent roles of online mentors in MOOCs

Context

MOOC platforms use different tools and learning designs for course delivery. It is widely agreed that once the design stage is complete, the delivery stage needs to be supported with human tutors, mentors, or facilitators. An informed choice of the most suitable approach to delivery is critical to the success of the course.

Mentors have an important role to play in fostering an engaged and well-connected learning community via various forms of interventions. Careful planning and implementation of intervention guidelines can be beneficial in aligning the affordances of the platform with the particular course design.

Another role mentors can perform is that of researchers. Mentors are those in direct contact with the learning community, and can generate valuable accounts of the interactions occurring there. They can also gather learner feedback in a structured manner so that course content can be adjusted in further iterations.

Platform and course

The workshop will draw from a specific MOOC entitled 'Understanding Language: Learning and Teaching' on the FutureLearn platform, which ran in autumn 2014. This course attracted a large number of active participants (around 30,000), and was designed to promote "learning as conversation" in which course mentors have a significant role to play.

Aim and benefits to participants

The workshop aims to demonstrate the strategies which MOOC mentors might employ to foster a connected learning community and promote social learning at scale in the face of massive numbers of participants. It also aims to suggest ways to report perceptions of learners for research purposes. Workshop participants will gain practical experience of creating educational interventions of various kinds using platform tools, critically examine the challenges of social learning and mentoring on a MOOC, and explore the relationship between the affordances of the platform, participant needs, and pedagogical strategies.

Description

- Explore and discuss the affordances of MOOC platforms, and the traditional roles of online mentors (pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical)
- Introduce emergent the roles of 'mentor as connector' and 5 types of mentor intervention which aim to foster a more connected learning community
- Introduce the role of 'mentor as researcher' and ways to gather learner data through mentoring activity.
- Provide opportunities for participants to practice implementing these intervention types on examples of authentic discourse from the MOOC

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