MOOCs, educators and learning designers in UK HE

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Overview

- Socio-technical approach – Social Informatics
- MOOCs operate in a ‘3rd space’ across academic and professional boundaries
- Learning Designers are central and other seemingly peripheral actors are influential
MOOCs as ‘change agents’

- Openness and access
- Structure of HE
- Teaching and learning in HE
The connection between MOOCs and educator and learning designer roles and practices is under-researched

(Liyanagunawardena et al., 2013; Najafi et al., 2015; Veletsianos & Shephard, 2016)
Problem: Conflating the social and technical
Highlighting co-construction

There is a blindness to the mutually constitutive interaction of technologies and practices in many studies of education

Brown (2016)
Research question

To what extent does involvement in MOOC development influence the roles and practices of educators and learning designers in particular HE institutions?
Overview of the study

Research question 1: Whitchurch's 3rd space

Research question 2:

Research question 3: Boyer's categorisation of scholarship

Case study A

Interviews

Case study B

Document Analysis

Case study C

Participant Observation

STIN analytic strategy

Thematic analysis
Sub-questions focus on:

1. MOOC production socio-technical systems
2. Educator and Learning Designer roles
3. Educator and Learning Designer practices
Progress of case study research

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Social informatics

(Penniman, 2005)
Socio-Technical Interaction Networks (STIN)

(Challenger et al., 2010)
STIN – a definition

“a network that includes people, equipment, data, diverse resources, documents and messages, legal arrangements, enforcement mechanisms, and resource flows”

(Kling et al., 2003:48)
STIN research steps (1)

Identify:

- relevant system interactors
- core interactor groups
- incentives/pressures
- excluded actors/undesired actions

(Kling et al., 2003)
STIN research steps (2)

- existing communication forums
- resource flows
- system architectural choice points
- Map architectural choice points to socio-technical characteristics

(Kling et al., 2003)
Whitchurch’s ‘3rd Space’ (2008)

Professional staff

- ‘Perimeter’ roles eg
  - Generalist functions
    - eg registry, department/school management
  - Specialist functions
    - eg finance, human resources
  - ‘Niche’ functions
    - eg quality, research management

Examples of Institutional Projects in Third Space

- The Student Transitions Project eg:
  - Life and welfare
  - Widening participation
  - Employability and careers

- The Partnership Project eg:
  - Regional/community development
  - Regeneration
  - Business/technology incubation

- The Professional Development Project eg:
  - Academic practice
  - Professional practice
  - Project management
  - Leadership/management development

‘Perimeter’ roles eg

Academic Staff

- Teaching
- Pastoral support
- Teaching/curriculum development for non-traditional students
- Research
- Links with local education providers
- ‘Third leg’ eg public service, enterprise
Overview of the study

Case study A
Case study B
Case study C

Interviews
Document Analysis
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Thematic analysis

Research question 1
Whitchurch's 3rd space

Research question 3
Boyer's categorisation of scholarship
Elements of scholarship

- discovery
- application
- teaching
- integration

Boyer (1990)
Interaction of elements of scholarship

Boshier (2009)
Findings and discussion

- MOOCs operate within a 3rd space context
- Learning designers occupy a central, hub-like position in MOOC development
- Seemingly peripheral actors in MOOC development influence course design, technical configurations, and content selection
STIN diagram of MOOC development Uni A

- MOOC participants
- MOOC platform
- University ICT support
- Web-based applications
- Permissions and copyright conditions
- Legal team
- Learning designer
- Media production
- High production values
- Proxy course site
- Strategic decisions
- Educators
- Management steering group

Key:
- University actors
- External actors
- Non-human actants
“[name of LD] was “the linchpin” for the project
Educators perceive the relationship as one of “co-creation”, albeit one in which LDs implicitly retain “the final say”
LDs limit educator access to the platform – placing themselves as filter of content
“the emergence of broadly-based, extended projects across the university, which are no longer containable within firm boundaries, [and which] have created new portfolios of activity”

(Whitchurch, 2013: 25)
MOOCs as 3rd space activities

Adapted from Whitchurch, 2008
Educator practices and MOOCs

Boyer (1990)
Educator practices and MOOCs

“we can spread the word”

“provide thought leadership through research-lead teaching”

Boshier (2009)
Evaluation

- STIN is useful for a systems view of MOOC development
- MOOCs fit the 3rd space model, but STIN adds a concern with co-construction
- High degree of contingency in considering embeddedness alongside co-construction
References


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