Learning from Open Design: Running a Learning Design MOOC

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Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) give an opportunity for providing access to subjects of mass interest but also allow more niche subjects (Beavon, Commas-Quinn, de los Arcos & Hauck, 2013) to reach a larger audience than the more usual context of small-scale post-graduate courses. The OLDS-MOOC (Open Learning Design Studio-MOOC) is an example of such a course. Developed with funding from Jisc, in January 2013 a collaborative team from several universities presented a nine-week online course. The subject matter is learning design as an organised approach to online learning. This report considers the way in which the course was structured around as a project-based "pMOOC" in its approach to learning design, while also including alternative lighter routes. The impact it had on the team involved in developing and presenting the course is also briefly reviewed.

1. Introduction

The OLDS-MOOC project designed and ran a 9 week open course on learning and curriculum design. The course took place from 11 January 2013 to 13 March 2013. The course was collaboratively designed across 5 institutions, with input from several others both within the UK and international. The target audience in the design was individual educators from across the UK HE, FE, and community and skills sectors. Entry to the course was completely open with registration encouraged but not essential. Overall more that 1000 people registered for the OLDS-MOOC. The course avoided a single learning environment and mixed content-based sites with tools relevant to curriculum and learning design.

The project succeeded in meeting its vision of a collaborative and persistent experience that can be shown to have provided benefits to participants. However, the funded support reflects only part of the costs involved and relied on the commitment of project team, additional contributors and the enthusiasm of participants on the course.

2. Characteristics of OLDS-MOOC

The running of OLDS-MOOC had a particular context. It was a response to an opportunity offered by Jisc for a small amount of additional funding to further refine or embed outcomes from projects through an embedding programme. The programme allowed different approaches to embedding, such as handbooks, resource packs and online tools. For OLDS-MOOC the proposal was to build on the existing OULDI (Cross, Galley, Brasher & Weller, 2012) and other initiatives to develop an online course, recognising that it is a timely initiative to integrate with established interest in MOOCs, and also provides an exemplar of applying open learning as a way to refine, combine and disseminate project outcomes. The proposal and funding established specific aims for OLDS-MOOC that were then met as a project in itself it:

- Designed and delivered the 9 week Open Learning Design Studio MOOC http://olds.ac.uk

- Undertook evaluation throughout the course using a pre-selected participant group, end of course survey, analysis of activity, reflections for team and participants. (Results from the evaluation are not included in this short report.)

- Produced a persistent collection of Open Educational Resources (OER) with appropriate Creative Commons licence

- Involved projects from the Jisc Curriculum Design programme beyond OULDI

- Provided weekly activities bringing in contributions from UK, EU and international experts.

- Used OULDI approaches in designing the MOOC through a workshop and open design process.

- Used tools from projects within the course. In particular it employed the Cloudworks system, Pedagogic Planner, demonstrated outputs from OULDI, and showcased the work of other partners.

A badging system was also developed within Cloudworks to implement the Mozilla Open Badges Infrastructure (Knight & Casilli, 2012). This is available for anyone to use an provides a model for other implementation. The badging has already been used on two other open courses and the understanding of

requirements transferred to work on adding badges within the Moodle learning environment.

3. OLDS-MOOC Home Page

Course topics

The primary output is the OLDS-MOOC content (accessible via http://olds.ac.uk) this provides access to 9 weeks of activities that are structured on a modified version of design thinking (Mor & Mogilevsky, 2012). This sequences as:

1. Initiate

2. Inquire

3. Ideate

4. Connect

5. Prototype

6. Curate

7. Evaluate

8. Reflect

9. Plenary

A full breakdown of the approach is not given here. However as the course has been openly provided and licensed, the complete course is available for viewing via http://olds.ac.uk with each weekly page providing a summary of expected learning outcomes, a recorded introduction, task descriptions and resources.

The design encourages the participants to think about and then work on projects in collaboration with others. However this is interpreted flexibly. For example in week 3 two paths are offered. One where learners work on applying design techniques to produce items such as curriculum maps, flows and storyboards for there planned project and publicly share and cluster these. The other path to review these same techniques observing and joining in with the reviewing and gathering of relevant resources, but not applying techniques directly. In the context of a formal course we would almost certainly have felt that we needed to mandate the development of a project, for an open course the choice needs to be with the participant and

we sought to avoid a structure of compulsion and subsequent guilt at missing out steps.

Impact

The flexible design and use of multiple systems made eventual participation hard to track. A clearer view on numbers will be possible once activity data has been analysed, however the very openness of the experience limits the extent to which this can be quantified. Examples of very positive experiences have emerged through the final stages that included sharing and showcasing work in the MOOC. For example the 10 selected showcase descriptions can be accessed at http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloudscape/view/2877.

The evaluation is designed to take into account data from several sources in an attempt to balance the enthusiasts who have taken the course beyond our own expectations with those who found themselves unable to engage. Data used will include:

- Use of authentic outputs from participants that have been openly shared.

- Reflections from the project team and those who provided content for the MOOC

- An open survey directed at all registered participants (whether active or not)

- Telephone/email interviews with a pre-determined sample of 15 participants (whether active or not).

The analysis of benefits to learners and the team will be included in the evaluation and final reports.

4. Summary and Reflection

The project exceeded expectations in terms of the eventual product and connecting with enthusiastic learners. It fell short of the numbers attained by other "MOOCs" but was in line with foreseen numbers within the project.

The effort into the project was more than that supported by Jisc or formally agreed by institutions. This was not a surprise, however the pressure during presentation was high and led to additional assigned effort as well as individuals going beyond reasonable requests. This is part of the nature of live events at scale and contributes to the excitement and interest.

The design of a "project-based" pMOOC could be reapplied as a model for other training situations. This is being considered for the EU supported METIS project. The setting out of the learning design of the MOOC as a separate action was useful but also might have contributed to some relaxation in urgency: it is not the same to have something in a design as it is to have it available to learners.

Implementing a MOOC causes pressures. The experience on OLDS-MOOC suggests several ways these could be mitigated:

- Set out an explicit quality check stage that is sufficiently lightweight to fit timescales

- Incorporate small scale developmental testing run-throughs

- Separate production and presentation responsibilities within a small team

- Determine a timetable for involvement during presentation that includes synchronous events.

- Enforce deadlines. The MOOC approach offers alternative solutions for most situations but these need time to put in place.

This project was successful but also stressful. A more measured approach to rerunning or developing a similar course would be able to draw on these experiences.

References

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