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Stop making sense: learning, community, digital citizenship and the massive in a post-MOOC world

Conference Item

Original citation:

Bryant, Peter (2015) Stop making sense: learning, community, digital citizenship and the massive in a post-MOOC world. In: ALT-C: The Association for Learning Technology Conference, 8 -10 September 2015, Manchester, UK.

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46223/>

Available in LSE Research Online: October 2015

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Stop making sense: Learning, community, digital citizenship and the massive in a post-MOOC world

Bryant, P., Fryer, C., & Moon, D. (2015). *Stop making sense: Learning, community, digital citizenship and the massive in a post-MOOC world*. Paper presented at the ALT-C: The Association for Learning Technology Conference, University of Manchester, UK. 8-10 September.

<https://altc.alt.ac.uk/2015/sessions/stop-making-sense-learning-community-digital-citizenship-and-the-massive-in-a-post-mooc-world-957/>

This paper will present the preliminary findings from a critically reflective evaluation of 'ConstitutionUK', an online crowdsourcing project with over a thousand participants that represents phase two of an ambitious, multi-year civic engagement project from the LSE's Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) to crowdsource a written constitution for the United Kingdom. We will outline the assumptions that informed the initial pedagogic and instructional design processes, the challenges of implementation, the role and potential of the 'massive', the multiplicity of project outcomes and the difficulty in assessing and evaluating the educational value of the community's experience.

It can be argued that many first-wave MOOCs squandered the power of the 'massive'. Armando Fox describing his experience of teaching a MOOC identified the massive aspect of MOOCs as magnifying the influence of 'vocal jerks' and cheats, as well as interfering with the individual learners 'intimate experience' with the learning (Fox, 2013). Losh (2014) argues that massive is a 'contested term' as it celebrates the scope and scale of learner participation but also encourages hierarchies, exclusion and dominant behaviours (Losh, 2014). However, thinking about the massive in terms of participation numbers and completions makes sense in the modern metrics of a successful higher education provision (Brennan and Shah, 1994, Gale and Hodge, 2014). Alternately, it can be argued that first-wave MOOCs rarely challenged the primacy of the 'course' in terms of structure and outcome, utilising traditional stop/start points, weekly engagements and a constructive approach to sequence (Siemens, 2013). This equally makes sense in the context of our understanding of distance and residential education. However, as Morris and Stommel (2015) note '...the best potentials of the crowd are squandered by a desire to build something that *makes sense*'.

While not a project with explicit educational aims, ConstitutionUK nevertheless presented a number of educational opportunities. Our approach was to leverage existing best practices in online and blended learning as an intrinsic part of the overall user engagement strategy for the project, though – critically – without invoking the traditional (sensible) HE pedagogies that have characterised the significant majority of first-wave MOOC offerings. We argue that within the context of this project, the integration of peer and crowd engagement, informal learning and participatory democracy in order to empower 'the massive' to make and participate in change challenges the role of the institution and the academic in an open space. What emerged was a flexible set of pedagogic principles and an innovative instructional approach that proudly bear the influences of connectivism, social-constructivism, experiential and non-formal learning and which synthesise aspects of each of these into a compelling and transformative user proposition which, we hope, may prove to be a valuable contribution to the emerging, post-MOOC landscape.

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