10 Mentored open online communities (MooCs) as a third space for teaching and learning in higher education

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Introduction

Online learning environments have been promoted as educational innovations with tremendous potential. Originally framed as massive open online courses (MOOCs), large-scale, open, online learning experiences have gained significant attention under the dichotomised umbrellas of either revolutionising education or failing our schools. Often missing from this conversation is the recognition that MOOCs can be implemented in various ways, from traditional instruction that is merely housed online to highly innovative pedagogical approaches. To provide a third space for teaching and learning in higher education institutions, we modified the original framing of MOOC to develop our own mentored open online community (MooC). We moved to a mentoring ecosystem to provide a space distinct from the face-to-face or online discussion forums typical in higher education classrooms. Our goal was to develop a dynamic, hybrid community allowing educators and participants to share knowledge and connect with each other.

This chapter explores a case study of a social media project that evolved around the hashtag #WalkMyWorld and developed into this alternative type of online learning experience. A group of university teacher educators sought to break through dichotomous perspectives by experimenting with a hybrid environment 'removed' but still embedded within face-to-face classes, allowing participants to communicate, socialise and learn in a flexible, open environment.

Our alternative version of an open, online course occurred somewhat accidentally. The #WalkMyWorld project originally developed through the use of a common hashtag and ten *learning events* (i.e. suggested projects carefully crafted by project creators) that participants would complete and share openly online. Loosely organised around a Twitter hashtag (#WalkMyWorld), the project allowed participants to engage in the process of multimodal meaning-making with various digital texts and tools (Bruner, 1990; O'Byrne, 2014).

#WalkMyWorld was conceived as a third space to support learners in online spaces, offering a new organisational structure within face-to-face undergraduate and graduate-level education courses. This third space brings together students' personal online practices and those that are privileged in schools and institutions

of higher education – both crucial contributors to the evolving learning environment. Fuelled by thinking about open, online learning courses, #WalkMyWorld invited students and instructors to connect openly through creative responses to multimodal prompts (learning events), presented online.

A unique learning community developed around the Twitter hashtag – the sole text and connection for all learners. Participating students, teachers and professors offered and received glimpses into each other's lives, validation, humour and knowledge. While the immediate focus was on sharing, connecting and learning, a bigger lesson centred on understanding that learning can occur anywhere, anytime and without intentional scripting. All participants were encouraged to experiment with and learn the tools of online social and scholarly connections, consider issues of digital identity, and witness the power of global, digitally connected networks. Though many participants were involved because of instructor mandates, the notion of hashtag-as-classroom invited a wider audience, incorporating a sense of authenticity to both process and product. We attempted to empower educators and students of all levels to engage in open scholarship practices, while balancing internal and external motivation to share their digital lives. What ultimately, accidentally, evolved was a powerful MOOC-like learning experience facilitating global connections among participants.

Perspectives on online pedagogy

Multiple theoretical perspectives inform our work and viewpoints on the use of open, educational learning experiences in higher education settings. As we witness the proliferation of MOOCs from various public and private entities, we notice a tendency to accept the movement and acronym MOOC as a new form of online learning (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Kop, Fournier, & Mak, 2011). However, MOOC is arguably a popularisation of an already-started revolution in online learning, which, in the 15 or 20 years of research and exploration of online pedagogy, has worked to identify principles for effective online teaching strategies (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens, & Cormier, 2010). As educators continue to unpack best practices in open, online pedagogy, we see ourselves incorporating this work into our move toward a more complex, nuanced framing of online learning relying on a mentoring ecosystem – a space distinct from the face-to-face or online discussion forums typical in higher education. Toward this end, our modified version of the MOOC connects work in open learning, hybrid or blended learning, and traditional MOOCs. From these intersections, we advocate for development of mentored, open, online communities – MooCs.

What is open learning?

Open learning or open education 'can be defined as a set of practices, resources and scholarship that are openly accessible, free to use and access, and to re-purpose' (Graham, LaBonte, Roberts, O'Byrne, & Osterhout, 2014, p. 418). Educators who support the open learning/education movement often argue that knowledge should

be free and that anyone should be able to access an education. This approach also encourages teachers and learners to engage in collaborations, create networks and connect new forms of knowledge (O'Byrne, Roberts, LaBonte, & Graham, 2014).

Based on beliefs about open learning, some educators argue that educational resources should also be open. These resources (e.g. open education resources – OERs) are 'learning materials licensed in such a way as to freely permit educators to share, access, and collaborate in order to customize and personalize content and instruction' (Bliss, Tonks, & Patrick, 2013, p. 3). OERs are teaching, learning and research resources that exist in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual licence that permits use or repurposing by others (Hilton, Wiley, Stein, & Johnson, 2010). OER include full courses, learning modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software and other resources, materials or tools used to scaffold learners (Atkins, Brown, & Hammond, 2007). The proliferation of these texts on the internet can be an empowering tool that allows individuals to create, share, connect and learn with other like-minded individuals around the globe (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; McVerry, Belshaw, & O'Byrne, 2015). It should be noted that the use of OER in the classroom often poses challenges for educators who want to integrate this valuable resource into their classroom. This was one of the reasons why we chose to integrate OER into the #WalkMyWorld project.

What is hybrid or blended learning?

Hybrid or blended learning is a pedagogical approach including a combination of face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction (Ferdig, Cavanaugh, & Freidhoff, 2012). In current research, the terms blended learning, hybrid learning and mixed-mode learning are often used interchangeably (Martyn, 2003). This instructional approach provides learning opportunities that take place 'outside of, and integrated with, the classroom' (Graham et al., 2014, p. 420).

In this mix of instruction, learners and instructors work collaboratively to improve the quality of learning and instruction (Bonk & Graham, 2012). The internet and other educational technologies are used to provide realistic, practical opportunities to make learning independent, useful and sustainable (Heinze & Proctor, 2004). Research and continued investigation of hybrid learning and online pedagogy shows that there is no one perfect method to balance face-to-face and online instruction in a way that is perfect in every situation for every learner (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Educators and instructors in secondary and higher education populations are often challenged as they learn how to effectively integrate hybrid learning into their discipline. To support instructors as they plan and deliver instruction in these spaces, we worked to facilitate and mentor #WalkMyWorld project participants by developing models of effective hybrid instruction.

What is a MOOC?

As bricks-and-mortar educational institutions renew their focus on internet learning environments, the emphasis on open, online learning as encompassed by a

MOOC has become viewed as increasingly valuable. The acronym simply stands for massive open online course; however, the interpretation of MOOCs and their subsequent implementations are anything but simple. Broad generalisations of MOOCs do not consider the nuanced ways that theorists and practitioners conceptualise educational practices and learning in online spaces; that is, the idea and how they 'are implemented into practice are not the same thing' (Ferdig, 2013, p. 1). While MOOCs have quickly expanded their notoriety, popularity and hype, there have also been serious questions arise about their pedagogical effectiveness and reach (Morrison, 2013).

Changing perspectives on MOOCs

In the course of development it appeared that MOOCs had 'split into two variants of courses, which were known as cMOOCs and xMOOCs' (Daniel, 2012). Daniel (2012) defined cMOOCs as the type encouraging collaboration and social learning, while xMOOCs are the video version of a 'sage on the stage'. A 2013 study revealed that 97% of learning materials in these courses were in the form of lecture videos – in other words, non-interactive content (Morrison, 2013). Similarly, other massive educational environments, like communities of enquiry, provide learning opportunities in a more informal and collegial manner but lack specific learning objectives. Other educators argue for an additional type of MOOC, which is more task-based and focuses on developing skills relating to the learner's task completion (Lane, 2012; Yeager, Hurley-Dasgupta, & Bliss, 2013). Additionally, a recent synthesis of MOOC literature reflects a 'troubling' of the apparent cMOOC/xMOOC binary and the term 'MOOC' itself (Bayne & Ross, 2014). While Bayne and Ross (2014) indicate that these can be helpful with defining and categorising MOOCs broadly, they also argue that it could lead to misrepresentation of a given MOOC's participatory activities, limit future MOOC development, and provide numerous examples of newer online learning environments pushing past the typical MOOC acronym and creating their own to suit their needs – e.g. POOC – participatory open online course; SPOC – small private online course (p. 22).

Crichton (2015) sees a drawback of MOOCs in that that they do not capture and retain the 'power of primacy' in students' lives. That is, the two traditional forces that deem higher education's primary (focal) position in one's life – the physical university setting and the associated financial commitment – are absent in most MOOCs. He suggests that future success with MOOCs depends upon developers understanding and targeting issues of motivation and primacy. In the #WalkMyWorld project, issues of motivation did affect participant performance, to the point that some students questioned why they were being required to socialise and communicate online; one student finished each of her tweets that was prompted by a class activity with the hashtag '#mandatedtweet'.

A move toward mentoring

Daniel's (2012) conception of cMOOCs and xMOOCs is useful, particularly in terms of helping MOOCs become as collaborative and authentic as possible while

still meeting the instructional needs of learning objectives, competencies and goals for a course. Any hybrid experience needs to take into account what we have known for years about the need to avoid contrivance in our classrooms and instead to build upon students' interests (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997). In #WalkMyWorld, while we incorporated video, we veered away from video lectures. We embraced informal and collegial learning and left room for educators to target specific learning objectives across various settings. Likewise, the learning events were clearly task-based, but the notion of 'task' was overshadowed by participants' choices and interpretation of task, offering a new kind of authentic online engagement.

MooCs

As bricks-and-mortar institutions consider the possibilities for online pedagogy, we recognise the importance of examining foundational educational theories regarding the relationships between content, motivation and learning. We agree that 'we must think more deeply about motivation and primacy in order to build a new mix that takes advantage of the Internet's best properties while competing with the quality of the university experience' (Crichton, 2015, Education 2.0, para. 2). However, we suggest that MOOCs should not compete with the university experience but rather complement and even elevate it by adding an instructor-guided global connection. With #WalkMyWorld, we demonstrate one way to connect the local (classroom) and global nodes (internet) so that the open, online community becomes a supplement to the local university experience. Educators can embrace the positive features of already-existing MOOCS and enrich teaching and learning but mentor toward immediate objectives, competencies and goals of specific courses.

The widespread development and implementation of personal learning connections to support interconnected sharing and learning shows tremendous promise. With emphasis on social learning, local environments may employ multiple facilitators to shape student achievement, skill and competency. Social learning engagement may encourage more skilful participants to become coaches to other participants, encourage learning by teaching, and support other participants. Experienced online educators often indicate that interactivity is the 'heart and soul of effective asynchronous learning' (Pelz, 2004, p. 41). In this work we suggest that the emphasis on 'massive' participation in these learning experiences places the focus on the scope, rather than the objectives and quality, of learning interaction. If effective learning is the ultimate goal, perhaps we should replace the M in MOOC with 'mentored'.

In our framing or conception of the MOOC, we focus on a learning experience we call a mentored, open, online community – MooC. The acronym change is not just semantic; the change in terminology is important. We advocate using online, hybrid learning environments to act as a third space to scaffold and support learners. A mentored community opens new possibilities for bringing 21st century technologies into novel organisational structures in order to connect classrooms with the 'real world'. During #WalkMyWorld, we chaperoned, or guided, learners (initially preservice teachers) as they interacted in online spaces, a concept that distinguishes our version – MooC – from the more familiar framing of a MOOC. Our open, online

learning community utilises a third space with an emphasis on mentoring, brings together local and global nodes, and mentors learners in online social–educational practices through the development of community learning events.

Third space for learning

Third space is a created learning environment in which the dominant perspective of a teacher or institution and the localised perspective of the students intersect. '[W]hat counts as knowledge and knowledge representation' is negotiated through productive tension between sociocultural values, knowledge and practices of the students and those of the dominant perspective (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995, p. 468). The dominant perspective is essentially 're-keyed' as a result of interaction with the students, and a bridge is created between the cultural resources in each group (Gutiérrez et al., 1995).

Third space is not limited by academic discipline. It can provide a framework for social justice issues, a 'navigational space' between different discourses in students' lives, a space for pushing back on traditional academic practices, or a combination of these (Moje et al., 2004). Third spaces can enact and foster hybrid literacy practices that involve both the traditional school practices and the sociocultural practices of the students (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999).

Mentored learning space

Our mentored online learning experience examines students' sociocultural practices in the context of social media and other internet environments while exploring the prospects of blended learning and online courses. The 'everyday' online practices of students are reflective of their socially-motivated engagement with multiple literacies – their interactions with online texts are not limited to reading but involve audio, video and images, as well as the multiple platforms (e.g. wikis, threaded discussion boards and social media websites), facilitating these creative and exploratory interactions (Boyd, 2014; Garcia & Seglem, 2013). Innovative educators utilise these platforms as a way to create a third space bridging students' everyday multi-literacies and those required by schools in order to merge their interactions and experiences within that third space (e.g. Dymoke & Hughes, 2009; Garcia & Seglem, 2013). Using Twitter hashtags, we were able to connect the various local university nodes to the global node consisting of all #WalkMy-World participants in a unique third space. Our third space was distinctly different from face-to-face and traditional online courses – the hashtag classroom remained dynamic, fostering meaningful connections and digital identity explorations between participating students, educators and researchers.

Local and global nodes of mentors

This framing of our mentored learning community started with a collection of teacher educators and literacy researchers. We wanted to provide a space for

our students to collaborate, learn and connect with others online. Furthermore, we wanted to share the expertise of the collaborating instructors to collectively guide and mentor each others' students. Finally, we wanted to conduct this work together openly and online in a space that was ecologically valid, with methods, materials and context approximating the real world of online social media practices. To support learners, many of whom had never shared content or tweeted online, we needed both local and global nodes in our project.

The global node of our open learning experience was the hashtag used to connect all learners across the learning activities. We selected the hashtag #WalkMyWorld to connect participants and identify the ethos of the project. Our thinking was that the hashtag could permeate the various social networks that our participants frequented (e.g. Twitter, Google+, Facebook). We also built a website[1] to act as a canonical address through which all content and learning activities for the project would be shared.

The local nodes of our MooC included the various instructors and facilitators of the project that conducted face-to-face classes with #WalkMyWorld participants. As a point of emphasis, many of the participants engaged in the project as a mandatory activity or assessment for their classes. As stated earlier, the majority of the participants in the first two years of the project have been students in higher education programmes. We believe that it was important to support students who might not immediately connect with the MooC, lurk for a while, and then quit. The local connection ensured immediate face-to-face support and offline guidance from instructors, adding the elements of motivation and primacy missing from traditional massive courses.

Community learning events

As we developed the learning events, we wanted to provide opportunities for our participants to learn, have fun and produce something that they could share. Guided by the maker movement initiative (Dougherty, 2012), we knew that participants would come from varied backgrounds and have personal interests to share with this mentored learning community. We also knew that instructors on the local level would have instructional objectives that might differ from the interests and objectives of the other facilitators. To address this design challenge, for each learning event we included a common *make* (or project) for all participants that allowed for a shared experience. This common make was basic and approachable for all, regardless of expertise or prior training in online content construction (O'Byrne, 2013). Each learning event included guiding examples that offered support while encouraging creativity and out-of-the-box thinking. This design flexibility afforded instructors the opportunity to better match specific course objectives by conforming the makes to their own course content while still benefiting from the community element. The hashtag #WalkMyWorld organised learners across local and global nodes and promoted connection and collaborative learning in a space between classrooms and students lived experiences.

An illustrative case study

As an opportunity to provide an illustrative example of the MooC described above, we have developed a case study of the #WalkMyWorld project. The purpose of this two-year case study is to provide a better understanding of the purpose, objectives and decisions made in operationalising a project of this magnitude, allowing readers of this chapter an opportunity to critique and identify opportunities to develop this form of mentored learning community in their own disciplines.

The #WalkMyWorld project

Though the project invited participants from across the globe and various other instructional settings, this MooC centred on teacher educators from various institutions of higher education chaperoning pre-service and in-service teachers as they interacted in online spaces. It thus provided a space not only for us to consider the affordances of new technologies, sprawling online spaces, and spiralling social network communities, but also to simultaneously reflect upon these in relation to foundational tenets of education. As such, the project shed light on potential advantages of our adaptation of the familiar MOOC as an educational enterprise.

As teachers and teacher educators, we continually reflect upon what good teaching and learning looks like in the face-to-face classroom. Dewey (1938) characterised education as, 'intelligently directed development of the possibilities inherent in ordinary experience' (p. 89). We intended to expand the 'ordinary experience' by broadening our definition of 'text' in online communities and hybrid spaces. Barnes' (1976) sentiment supports and elaborates upon this idea:

> To become meaningful a curriculum has to . . . come together in a meaningful communication – talk, write, read books, collaborate, become angry with one another, learn what to say and do, and how to interpret what others say and do. A curriculum as soon as it becomes more than intentions . . . is a form of communication.
>
> (p. 14)

Since many #WalkMyWorld participants were also our students, their tweeted responses to the learning events presented reflected a unique element of curriculum, which was continually and recursively co-created by participants and mentors. Blending content and collaboration both within the classroom and in more personal (private) spaces represented a vibrant form of communication enhanced by self-expression, self-reflection and identity development. At a time where standardised testing dominates much of pedagogical discussion, this kind of 'curriculum' becomes vitally important.

The #WalkMyWorld project has evolved through two iterations – that is, two sets of ten learning events over the course of two years. Participants in the first year initially included professors, teachers, pre-service teachers and adolescents

identified by a core group of researchers. In courses on college campuses across the United States, these researchers integrated the project into coursework, allowing the hashtag to act as a catalyst for both expected and unexpected connections and growth. Ultimately, #WalkMyWorld attracted the curiosity of participants from schools and universities across the country and globe, many of whom became repeat participants and/or mentors during Year 2.

Year 1 of the #WalkMyWorld project – 2014

Learning events in the first year of the project were inspired by the poetry of Robert Hass, whose poems are marked by 'random collocations of things', which the poet has referred to as 'gatherings', left random (Hofmann, 1997, At the Center of Things, para. 3). We embraced this aspect of the poetry with the idea that, over the course of ten weeks and through ten learning events, #WalkMyWorld participants could 'gather' various aspects of their own 'worlds'. The only real rules guiding participant makes for each learning event was that they post these using Twitter and include the #WalkMyWorld hashtag.

Guided by carefully crafted learning events, participants took photos, authored short pieces, and filmed small glimpses of their lives. At weekly intervals, they documented their 'walks' using digital tools such as Instagram (http://instagram.com/) and Vine (https://vine.co/), photo and video capture tools that easily allow users to share content to Twitter. By collecting snippets of their worlds that seemed trivial one at a time, participants experienced the magic that, when strung together, these digital 'gatherings' presented narratives of very human things – pain, beauty, joy, friendship and wonder.

During the ten weeks of the project, instructors were able to target specific educational objectives revolving around (but not limited to) explorations with poetry. With the understanding that creating and sharing digital content in online spaces might be a novel and even scary experience, instructors also charged participants to grapple with what to share and how. A third consideration regarding sharing emerged as participants contemplated *how* and *how much* to share. Accordingly, thoughtful experimentation online, connection with digital texts and tools, and play, ultimately served as valid, if not crucial, educational outcomes.

Year 2 of the #WalkMyWorld project – 2015

Taking cues from the ideas that worked best in the first year, organisers expanded the scope of learning events beyond just one genre and poet. Learning events were designed to incite personal exploration of offline and online identity as well as raise questions about how a digital presence can either reflect or disguise a person. Though a few individuals took on the role of learning event creator, the use of a shared public Google Doc invited and welcomed continuous input from anyone who embraced this aspect of the project and had something to offer. Collectively, the project facilitators worked to offer clear objectives, intriguing prompts and guiding examples for each of ten learning events.

We were determined to leave space not only for individual interpretation at the local node but also for authentic tangents of individual interest, exploration and discovery. Year 2 learning events included a wide range of multimodal texts including literary works, visuals and videos, but local mentors had more freedom to adapt, choose alternatives or focus on particular learning events. More diverse groups joined the second iteration of the project. Participants included pre-service teachers in disciplinary literacy, language development, multicultural education and English education courses as well as teacher educators, K-12 teachers and primary-aged schoolchildren.

The diversity of participants meant the learning events evolved in an organic fashion into experiences that the organisers never anticipated. The idea of connection to others through digital space manifested right from the start. For instance, the first learning event, *My front door,* yielded a spectrum of interpretation from pictures of actual front doors to photos of classroom doors, car doors, oven doors and even computers described as digital doorways. The second learning event, which encouraged connections via virtual high fives, led to responses in a multitude of modes and for as many reasons as there were participants. These opening events afforded participants the opportunity to begin to explore their digital identities as they grappled with what, how, and how much to share. How deep should they go? How real (or masked) do they dare to be? These events, often mandatory but not necessarily graded, allowed participants to dive in with a splash or wade in gently. We could not have imagined the impact of Australian school children as they shared through their class blog, nor of participants connecting through an affinity for *Doctor Who*. Likewise, the number of Tweets that indicated new revelations about dreams or defining 'hero' was something hoped for, but not really expected. On the whole, in its second iteration, #WalkMyWorld burgeoned with surprises while simultaneously becoming more personal and more diverse.

Lessons learned from the #WalkMyWorld project

As #WalkMyWorld developed, the impact of the mentor at the local node began to influence how different learning events were interpreted. An event centred on personal totems became a lesson on social acceptance in New South Wales, as elementary students were encouraged to consider traditional tattooing as a totem. Other classes responded to the same learning event through multimedia presentations, mashups or collages[2] representing individuals' idea of a totem as a being, spirit or symbol serving to unite us, bringing us back to 'our place' or home.

This flexibility and interconnection of local and global nodes in our mentored learning community allowed each instructor to customise the experience for the needs of his/her classroom and curricula. There was no 'right way' to teach and learn within this learning environment, there was only the way that evolved as individuals explored the events with their classmates, mentors and extended community. Organisers and instructors mentored the process, and connections were possible across geographic and social backgrounds. This made the project

fluid and unpredictable, but also exciting as groups joined and began their own journeys.

There are several limitations that we have used to guide future iterations of the project. We also consider some of these limitations to be possible byproducts of open, online education and avenues for future research. These include a need to investigate the effect on interaction and motivation within the learning experience by requiring that learners interact. Because many of the #WalkMyWorld participants were required to participate by their instructors, the issue of #mandatedtweets perplexed us. Another limitation of the study is that not all learners or participants of the project could be counted and quantified as it is an open, learning experience. Future research and developers of open learning experiences need to identify ways to connect and use feedback from 'lurkers' – individuals who are watching, but not overtly interacting in the experience. In addition to the challenge of lurkers interacting through observation, we are also cognisant and concerned about learner concerns about posting, connecting and sharing openly online. In the current milieu of the online space, many are concerned about privacy, security and identity. We cannot fault learners – would we entirely know about it in certain instances if they chose not to fully engage in the experience? One final limitation of the #WalkMyWorld project is that it is not a massive, open learning experience. It *is* open, online and focused on educational needs and perspectives. It is, however, not a massive project that openly connects learners online. As organisers, we would love the notoriety that comes with possibly connecting thousands of individuals around a hashtag and an idea. Perhaps the smaller, connected learning experience is far closer to the one-to-one mentoring learners' need as they create and curate their digital identity.

As with any new endeavour, not everything played out as anticipated. Overall, not as many individuals connected to each other as organisers had expected. However, interesting patterns emerged – some groups networked broadly and across populations, while others added hashtags to connect easily with those in the narrower classroom community. An attempt to include geotagging was largely abandoned, deemed as too cumbersome. There was also concern that the learning events themselves were too intense for a one-week turnaround. Addressing these concerns is already part of planning for the third iteration. Ultimately, we learned that in a welcoming, non-threatening network attracting like-minded educators who share knowledge freely, all learners could leverage the power of the web in a useful and practical way.

Discussion

In this chapter we have identified the challenges and opportunities in our exploration of roles that MOOCs play in the relationship between higher education and online learning. As we examine and recontextualise MOOC, we recognise that we stand at a single, fleeting point in time as online pedagogy progresses. We hope other researchers, instructors and educators will consider the model suggested

here and collaborate with colleagues across multiple disciplines to build unique learning environments. Creatively adapting existing pedagogical models as we have illustrated here may help advance learning initiatives that higher education institutions have been trying to address.

Because our framing of a closely mentored version connects instructors to learners, built-in accountability affords opportunities for clarity and personalisation that the traditional MOOC format often misses. Mentored communities expand the classroom beyond the limitations of walls and time constraints but include enough direction so that students are not left entirely to their own devices. Additionally, the opportunity for teachers to adapt learning events to meet the needs of specific districts or unit plans makes each participating group unique. Some instructors may choose to focus on literature presented across all learning events, while others may choose to focus on one particular learning event, creating a thread for their classes that may be something the creators never imagined. This flexibility offers opportunities to focus learning and research in multiple areas. Social justice, artistic expression and exploring ways to collect and analyse data become vibrant exercises in this setting. A newly-defined MooC becomes whatever its participants make of it – unlike the traditional MOOC formula, a mentored community cannot, nor is it intended to, replace the bricks-and-mortar classroom.

Engagement opportunities like the #WalkMyWorld project matter because they provide opportunities for educators and researchers to explore intersections that exist in hybrid learning spaces. Lines between face-to-face and online classrooms are blurring, and research needs to continue to examine the affordances of teaching, learning and socialising in these interstices. This exploration is even more complex as we consider the personal and social construction of identity occurring as educators enter their profession amid this changing landscape. We find it problematic to stop at a point in time, provide a label (i.e. MOOC), and believe this is the end of our examination of online pedagogy. As technologies advance, pedagogy must adapt. The paradigm of static models must be shifted to a new, more fluid approach to education.

In the #WalkMyWorld project, we worked with educators and students to recognise and employ digital texts and social media, making use of educational technologies to develop and enhance their ontological narratives. In effect, when a learner attempts to create meaning in the world, the associated activities can be viewed as collective socio-collaborative acts of meaning-making that impact various educational and social levels. Educators and their students need to recognise and use these online texts as readers and writers in digital spaces as they work toward self-actualisation.

Notes

1 For more information on the project, learning events and materials shared, please visit the following website: https://sites.google.com/site/walkmyworldproject/.
2 For examples of work submitted in the #WalkMyWorld project, please visit the following website https://sites.google.com/site/walkmyworldproject/case-studies.

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