Creating a Community Open Online Courses (COOCs) model to explore the implications for Popular Education approaches in online space

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Background

Literature

Methodology

Findings emerging
From Light bulbs to Exploding Feathers

Press here if things go wrong
Community Open Online Courses:
- emerged from ideas working with adult literacy students
- ‘followed’ me to Higher Ed and got some LSIS funding (which then *dissolved* – LSIS, not the funding!)
- website that allows for sharing of courses - I wanted a community self-build but had to use ‘preferred commercial provider’

The Big Idea was/is:
- Popular Education ethos in online space
- Everyone can teach/ everyone can learn/ knowledge generated by the community itself – roles self-selected & community generated from there
- Non-institutional affiliation
- Blending of virtual and real-world experiences/ learning – not just online.
- Involved production over passive consumption
- Avoid passivity of ‘hidden curriculum’ – generate active research of ‘hidden knowledge’
What Are COOCS?

Community Open Online Courses (COOCS) are an opportunity for people to share their passions, ideas and knowledge with each other. What learning is created is down to you, the users. Learning is most enjoyable when it is taught by those with enthusiasm and a desire to share what they know. The word 'courses' is loosely used; there are no exams, no tests, no qualifications required. The aim is to get people from all parts of the community to generate learning opportunities and to share their knowledge.

How the learning teaching looks, what it involves and what it includes is up to you. People learn in many ways and we hope you can bring creativity, enthusiasm and positivity as we start to create courses across many areas of interest.

http://www.coocs.co.uk
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Research Questions

‘To what extent are notions of emancipation and empowerment evident in the participants’ uses and experiences of COOCs?'

What **range of courses emerge** during the development of the COOCs project?

What **reasons do participants give** for their involvement with COOCs as either tutor/learner?

**How do participants experience COOCs** in relation to issues of technology, expertise and accessibility?

**In what ways do participants apply teaching and learning practices** in roles of both teacher and learner?

**How do participants describe their experiences on the COOCs project** with reference to positive and negative elements from their own involvement?
It is the aim of education to take part in the correcting of unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them...it must take account of the needs of existing community life. It must select with the intention of improving life we live in common’ (Adams & Horton, 1975, p. 13).
Trade Unions

Ragged Schools

Music Societies

W.M.C.

Philosophy groups
Theory And Practice

"If we don't want the information age to deliver widespread economic and political destruction, we must commit to including all citizens in a dialogue about creating a just and equitable future. In the end, our liberation is bound up in each other; we all sink or swim together."

DIGITAL DEAD END

by Virginia Eubanks

Fighting for Social Justice in the Information Age

COOCS community open online courses
Pedagogy & theories of learning/ teaching

Popular Education
Popular Technology
Community and Critical Pedagogy
Rhizomatic Learning
‘Bewildering Education’

*Humanisation* and *dehumanisation*

Teaching as Design

**Corporate, Cultural and Social – resistance and empowerment in timeless time**

Industrial Revolution
Deleuze and Societies of Control
Edupunk/ Ragged University/ Anarchogogy
Sugata Mitra and S.O.L.E.

Technological determinism
Grint & Woolgar
Brecht, McLuhan, Mumford, Mozorov
E-Learning Singularity paradigm – Gale
Parchoma
Bourdieu – autodidact (from *Distinction*)
The Development of Education in Accrington 1790 - 1903

‘All but the basic necessities of life were denied the majority of the population. The beautiful new factories and machines were the obverse of the miserable dwellings and subhuman existence of the hands’

Edgar Stone (1957)

Bertolt Brecht ‘Radio Theory’ 1927

‘If I believed our present bourgeoisie were going to live another 100 years then I would be certain it would continue to babble on for hundreds of years about the “tremendous possibilities” that the radio contains... A man who has something to say and has no listeners is bad off. Even worse off are listeners who can’t find something to say to them’

From ‘The Myths of Information: Technology and Post Industrial Culture’ 1980 – Edited by Kathleen Woodward

Lewis Mumford, The Pentagon of Power, 1970

‘...even if books are not abandoned but continue their present rate of production, the multiplication of microfilms actually magnifies the central problem – that of coping with quantity – and postpones the real solution...namely the reassertion of human selectivity and moral self-discipline leading to continent productivity. Without such self-imposed restraints the overproduction...will bring about state of intellectual enervation and depletion hardly to be distinguished from massive ignorance’

From ‘The Myths of Information: Technology and Post Industrial Culture’ 1980 – Edited by Kathleen Woodward
While each communication technology does have its own individual properties...the economic and political system in which the device is embedded always trumps technological possibilities and imperatives’

Radical, Community Education offers, ...alternatives in philosophy, pedagogy and institutional arrangements and...at root not a desire to be critical but indeed to create a whole alternative social order’ (p.6)

Lovett, Tom (1988)

‘Educating Yourself and others, especially in a knowledge of your circumstances, was a step in changing the world...knowledge as an natural right, an unconditional good’ (p.5)

A focus on education as Participation not Representation
Lovett’s Community ethos

‘...a basically optimistic view of human nature, one which stresses cooperation, fraternity, egalitarianism. It is basically a call for people, oppressed people, to have more control over their own lives, to shape their world and to use modern resources and technology to do so...

...it presupposes that it is possible, in modern circumstances, using modern tools and resources, to find a way whereby men and women can become more fully integrated into their social environment and find in it something deeply expressive of their own personality and aspirations’ (p.143)

Tom Lovett (1988)
Popular technology focuses on developing for a world in which all people can become more critical technological citizens, rather than teaching people technical skills or providing poor communities with technological resources.

Popular technology is not about teaching technology *per se*; it is a popular educational approach to researching the complex inequalities of the information economy.

(Eubanks, 2007, p.131)

Technology is not necessarily a means of liberation from oppression and can equally be seen as the means of oppression and limited opportunity.

Digital Divide in Eubank’s study reveals minimum wage workers in high tech industries – access and skills exist, but opportunities do not.

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Bourdieu’s description of the autodidact:

‘Because he has not acquired his culture in the legitimate order established by the educational system, the autodidact constantly betrays, by his very anxiety about the right classification, the arbitrariness of his classifications and therefore of his knowledge – a collection of unstrung pearls accumulated in the course of an uncharted exploration, unchecked by the institutionalised, standardised stages and obstacles, the curricula and progressions which make scholastic culture a ranked and ranking set of interdependent levels and forms of knowledge’

**Rhizomatic Learning**

Deleuze & Guattari’s concept – multiplicity over singularity/ rejection of tree metaphors and seeking tap roots, creating hierarchies – shift from the institutions as owners and creators of knowledge and meaning

Often romanticised, unproblematic reading of world for online learning – suggest a recognition of the disruptive potential of D & G

Open to knowledge creation from multiple sources – disrupts expert discourse

Human *becomings*, rather than human *beings*

*Minority and majority – the dehumanisation of the ‘many’ as the minority.*
*The raising of the few as ‘the majority’*

*Social as ‘machine’, assemblages – territorialisation/ deterritorialisation/ reterritorialisation*

*Lines of flight*
Popular Education
(again, because I think we need to regroup here!)

Popular Education sprang form many of the same roots as critical pedagogy but historically occupied a position closer to communities affected by oppression and maintained a stricter focus on practice...

[popular education] has the potential to resolve many of the enduring dilemmas of political pedagogy’

(Willig, N. 2011, Critical pedagogy and Popular Education: Towards a Unity of Theory & Practice)

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‘The disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network. Everywhere ‘surfing’ has already replaced the older sports’ (p.6)

‘One of the most important questions will concern the ineptitude of the unions: tied to whole history of their struggle against the disciplines or within the spaces of enclosure, will they be able to adapt themselves or will they give way to new forms of resistance against the societies of control?’ (p.7)

(Deleuze, G. ‘PostScript on the Societies of Control’ 1992)

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New forms of ‘Popular’, new concept of ‘Education’
Methodology

Participatory Action Research – ‘with not on people’

Deleuze *empiricism* – looking to experiences through the use of COOCs as shaping the views of the participants/ researcher on what occurs

Ontology of Hope – Paulo Freire – considering a world view that is shaped by awareness of need for change, not directed entirely by external/ prevailing world views

- Ethno-methodology, narrative through online texts/ interviews
- 12 respondents in first stage
- 200 users registered
- 16 courses published
- 35 courses unpublished
Open Survey sent to all 200 users and newsletter subscribers
The research so far:

Issues faced

Types of courses created

Responses from users
Themes

Crossing thresholds

Terminology
Language & meaning
Friendly or academic?

Resources

Technology (central)
Technology (person)
Commercial vs Community

Course Creation

• Predominantly Art & Humanities
• Mixture of personal/professional - a personal ‘take’ on professional content

Institutional as confining

‘Zen’– ‘It’s about doing what I thought teaching was, right back when I started, beyond the functional and within the spirit, the Zen of teaching maybe?’
Themes

Demographic*

- 56% have been/ are teachers**
- 72% of users are female*
- 40% have taken online course/ MOOC previously**

* Of 196 registered users **of 48 responses to survey

Play

- ‘...the chance to play, and share that play, is important, outside a role of having to be ‘sure’ something ‘works’ and in a place where we can be open to failing or making a mess’

Ego and identity

- ‘...Being myself, but not the professional self, just me’
- ‘...engaging beyond the walls, I don’t say what I do, I just show the work and hope that encourages discussion’
- ‘I wanted the second life avatar to take this course, no confusion between me and the avatar – it feels more free’

Depth of content

- ‘It [course on philosophy] is more, not less, concerned with the themes of philosophy as I see it...not being fixed by the curriculum I open with Diogenes, because he is more interesting, more crucial to where we are now – in course material, of course, it’s Plato, its Socrates, but here, I choose, my direction, my course’
- ‘Slow Learning, not the flow of the semester, but as we come to it, as it emerges’
Themes

Process over Product

‘Art is not about the artefact, it shouldn’t be, it’s about how we get there, the thoughts and ideas, the creative process, the evaluation and the assimilation of the world around us. Becoming an artist rather than being an accredited artist.’

‘I get that it’s about doing stuff, not just for a certificate. That’s important, knowing you can do something and not just being on a course that says you can – certificates can be good too though’

Revision of roles

‘For me it’s kind of opened up a lot more in the sense that actually going through that process, challenging myself as to think about what a COOC is, has kind of helped me to really kind of assess what I think, you know…teaching and learning is, in a way’ (Teacher – Art COOC)

‘…teaching is serious, if you say that you are teaching something, I will do it, yes, but not just like that, I need to know, it has to be good, I need to know it for certain, then I can teach it, but not until I know it’ (author of unpublished COOC – non-teacher background)

Time

‘Time, it’s got to be available to me when I’m free, I mean, I will do it, but it’s all time, and this is not, well, not that important compared to work…they pay me, and watch that I do it, it has to be done. Nobody would watch me for this, would they?’

‘Giving time is important, creating something that is worth sharing, it takes the time in creation, from the concept, the idea, to the materials, to the stuff people see’

Accountability

‘I would do it, but who would want to learn from me? You need to trust that they know, not just because I say you should, but trust, really trust that they know’ (Signed up as student/ Teacher, no courses created)

‘I want to get involved from an organisational point of view, it would help us share the resources, but how long will you be around? These things, they come and go so quickly, you put time and effort in and then whoosh, it’s gone’ (Homeless charity volunteer)
Food Budgeting with Food Bank volunteers; Dealing with Eviction with Shelter; Economic Factors for Food Scarcity with Ragged University; STOP PRESS – The COOCs on eviction has altered the Shelter guidance to reflect change in the law (November 2013) that changes what landlords need to include in eviction notices.
Next steps…

Forging relationship with Ragged University

Shifting to MOODLE, rejecting the commercial site

Create a more defined user group in online and f2f spaces