

MOOCs: Striking the Right Balance between Facilitation and Self-Determination

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Abstract

Recent research suggests that a growing proportion of formal learning occurs outside formal educational settings, where information and learning opportunities are mediated by technology. The rise of massive open online courses (MOOCs) in the last few years bears witness to this phenomenon. This contribution considers whether MOOCs afford a collaborative environment in which participants can develop the necessary literacy skills to become successful self-directed learners and members of online communities. It also discusses the extent to which self-determination and participatory literacy might be relevant for success in different types of MOOCs. The paper draws on data from OT12, an 8-week MOOC on open translation tools and practices run in 2012 by the Department of Languages of The Open University in the United Kingdom. The data consist of pre- and post-course surveys covering learners' backgrounds and prior experience of translation, expectations and challenges envisaged, and evaluation of outcomes. The authors conclude that to conceive of MOOCs as environments where individuals coalesce around a common endeavor is to raise a series of under-explored challenges. For organizers, the challenge lies in learning design and facilitation, and the extent to which their assumptions about the participants match the learners' capabilities. For learners, the challenge rests in self-determination and participatory literacy skills.

Keywords: massive open online course (MOOC), participatory literacy skills, self-determination, heutagogy, open practices, open translation

Introduction

Participatory literacy is the ability to contribute to blogs, wikis, social networking and sharing sites, virtual worlds, and gaming environments. It relies upon creativity, reasoning, focus, critical thinking and analysis, and the capacity to collaborate (Pegrum, 2009). Together with self-determination and motivation, such skills are fundamental to success in a massive open online course (MOOC) as conceptualized by [Cormier \(2010\)](#). The purpose of this study is to explore the interdependence between self-determination and participatory literacy in relation to success in a MOOC. A secondary aim is to shed some light on design challenges of MOOCs for educators. How can they create MOOCs that will optimize students' learning experience, developing the collaborative and individual skills they need to become active members of online communities?

The paper is based on data from OT12, an 8-week MOOC exploring open translation tools and practices run by the Department of Languages at [The Open University \(OU\)](#) in the United Kingdom. Participants engaged in readings, discussion forums, webinars, and the joint translation of open educational resources (OER) in order to explore a number of open translation tools. Data drawn from the pre- and post-course surveys provide a snapshot of the participants' language proficiency and translation experience, their expectations of what OT12 would be and the challenges it might raise, and their post-course evaluation of the event.

The paper's first section draws on [Lane \(2012\)](#) to distinguish between network-based, task-based, and content-based MOOCs, and advances the notion that each type of MOOC relies upon different levels of self-determined learning. In the process, the discussion introduces the concept of heutagogy, a theoretical approach that illuminates the nature of learning in MOOCs and highlights the critical role played by participatory literacy skills in MOOCs. It also relates current MOOC taxonomies ([Lane, 2012](#)) to [Canning's \(2010\)](#) and [Blaschke's \(2012\)](#) progression from pedagogy, to andragogy, and then to heutagogy, and discusses in how far self-determination and participatory literacy might be relevant for success in each type of MOOC.

The second section provides an outline of the OT12 MOOC and a discussion of the findings from two surveys carried out before and after the course. The final section presents some preliminary conclusions regarding the role of self-determination and participatory literacy skills when embarking on a MOOC.

MOOC Taxonomies

[Wiley \(2012a\)](#) somewhat provocatively states that the term MOOC is a misnomer and that most MOOCs violate at least one letter of the acronym. While he agrees that all MOOCs are online, [Wiley \(2012a\)](#) questions whether they are all massive, open, or even courses.

In the field of OER, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of free and open. This distinction is akin to that made by proponents of the open software movement, who distinguish between "free as in beer" (*gratis*) vs. "free as in speech" (*libre*) ([Tucker, 2007](#)). Looking at content available online, and the MOOC debate in particular, [Wiley \(2012b\)](#) considers that the distinction between free and open relates to two important dimensions: the cost to access, which can be free (courses on [Canvas Network](#), [Coursera](#), [Udacity](#)) or incur a fee (those on [Udemy](#), for instance); and the copyright, which can be traditional (©) or open, using, for instance, a [Creative Commons](#) (CC) license.

MOOCs have been broadly divided into two types, cMOOCs, and xMOOCs, which, as [Siemens \(2012\)](#) explains, are driven by different ideologies and learning approaches. While both offer a collection of resources, a predefined timeline with weekly topics, and associated work, the approach in cMOOCs is connectivist, emphasizing "creation, creativity, autonomy, and social networked learning" (para. 3). xMOOCs, in contrast, tend to have a more traditional learning approach that is more teacher-centered with content presented through short video lectures and learning tested through quizzes.

[Bousquet \(2012\)](#) distinguishes between "good MOOCs," which foreground a participatory approach and are based on a theory of knowledge as activity, and "bad MOOCs," which rely on "all the worst aspects of contemporary 'teaching' (lectures, tests, and a division of labor)," only on a massive scale (para. 6). The "good vs. bad" MOOC dichotomy obscures the fact that, as [Siemens \(2012\)](#) underlines, xMOOCs

are "extremely beneficial" to learners who "don't have access to learning materials of that quality at their institutions" or to those seeking access to leading experts in a particular field (para. 3).

In an attempt to move away from the cMOOC/xMOOC binary, Lane (2012) rejects the "good vs. bad" MOOC model and instead proposes three classifications: network-based, task-based, and content-based MOOCs (see Figure 1). In network-based MOOCs, the goal is socially constructed knowledge, developed through conversation and exploration that takes place through various communication channels and modes. Task-based MOOCs, on the other hand, emphasize skill development through the completion of tasks, and while success in those tasks relies upon collaboration, the creation of community is not a primary goal. The pedagogical approach of these MOOCs tends to be a mixture of constructivism and instructivism. Content-based MOOCs focus on content transmission and acquisition and tend to be instructivist in approach. They rely upon automated assessment, and while they might also include opportunities for networking and joint tasks completion, learners can take these courses without engaging with any of the participatory elements.

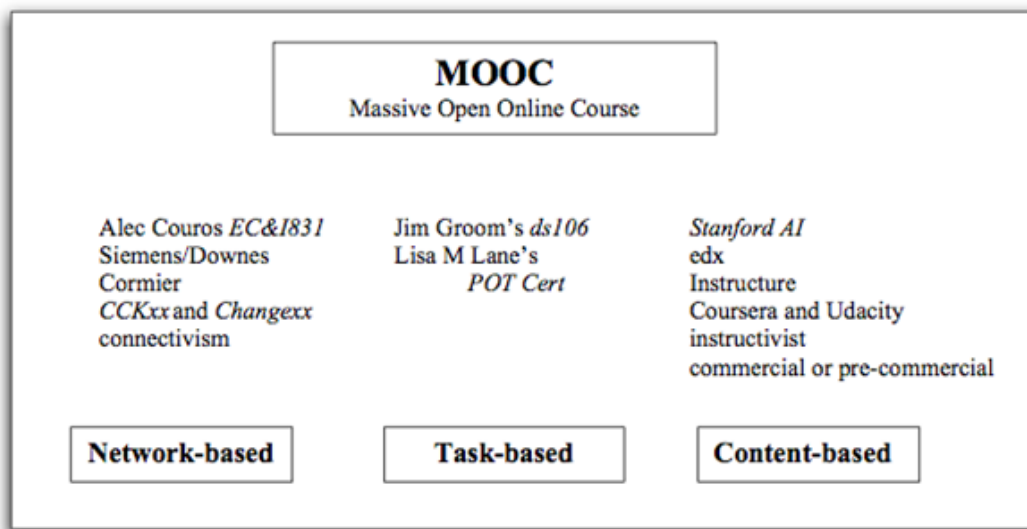


Figure 1. *Three kinds of MOOCs*

(The above figure is from "Three Kinds of MOOCs" [Web log post] by L. M. Lane, August 15, 2012, available at <http://www.lisahistory.net/wordpress/2012/08/three-kinds-of-moocs/> under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike](#) license.)

The Relevance of Heutagogy

From 2012, when MOOCs were propelled to education's center stage, MOOC participants were understood to be highly motivated and highly skilled learners who have the capacity to choose their own study resources and their own learning paths. As Downes (2012) posits: "MOOCs expect that their participants *will be motivated* and *will have learned how to learn*" (para. 12, emphases in original). Yet the three distinct categories of MOOCs pivot on different expectations around participatory learning and demand different participatory literacy skills. In order to understand learning in MOOCs, Wheeler (2012) points to the value of heutagogy, a theoretical approach that sees learners as highly self-determined individuals.

Defined over a decade ago by Hase and Kenyon (2000) as the study of self-determined learning, heutagogy "sees the learner as the major agent in their own learning, which occurs as a result of personal experiences" (Hase & Kenyon, 2007, p. 112). A definition of self-determination is provided by Salkind (2008):

The term self-determination is a motivational concept that has been explicated primarily in relation to self-determination theory (SDT), proposed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. To be self-determined is to endorse one's actions with a full sense of choice and volition. When self-determined, individuals experience a sense of freedom to do what is interesting, personally important, and vitalizing; they experience themselves as self-regulating agents of their own

behavior. Thus, self-determination signifies the experience of choice and endorsement of the actions in which one is engaged. (para. 1)

Web 2.0 tools and applications have contributed significantly to the renewed interest in heutagogical approaches to learning, as they enable individuals to choose and determine their learning journey and to take control of their learning experiences.

The heutagogical approach to learning stands at the end of a continuum that progresses from pedagogy to andragogy, with self-directedness as a key attribute (Knowles, 1975), to heutagogy (Blaschke, 2012; Canning, 2010) (see Figure 2). Movement along the continuum is marked by ever-increasing learner autonomy, a greater flexibility in course structure, and a decrease in tutor control. Drawing on Mezirow (1997), Blaschke argues that the heutagogical framework accelerates learners' cognitive development, strengthening their capacity for critical reflection.

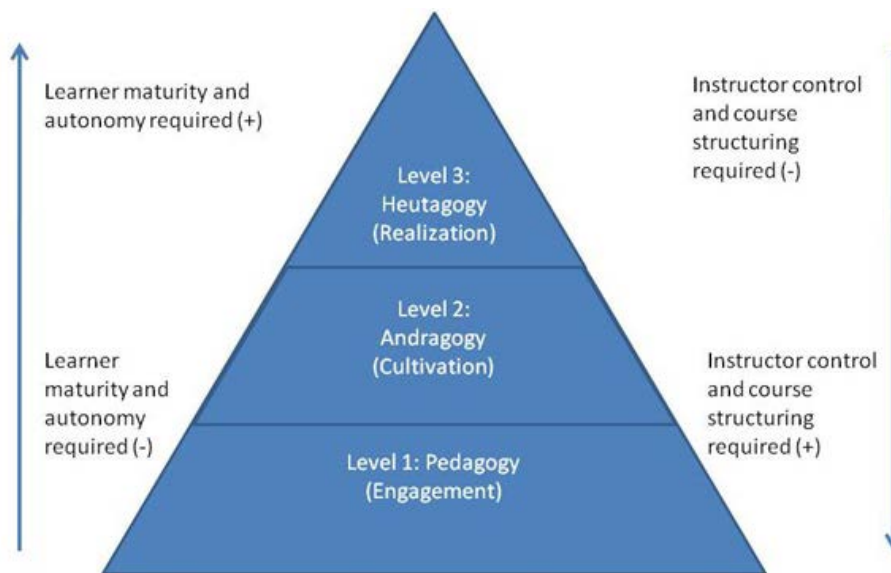


Figure 2. *Heutagogy as an extension of andragogy and pedagogy* (Blaschke, 2012, p. 60, based on Canning, 2010)

(The above figure is a recreation of a figure from "Heutagogy and Lifelong Learning: A Review of Heutagogical Practice and Self-Determined Learning" by L. M. Blaschke, 2012, *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 13(1), p. 60, available at <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1076/2087> under a [Creative Commons Attribution](#) license.)

One of the main principles of heutagogy is that people know how to learn. It therefore is a particularly apt theoretical approach to describe learning in open and distance education contexts in general and to assess learning based on the use of social media in particular. Wheeler (2012), for example, suggests that "the ethos of heutagogy extends to learner choice, where students can create their own programs of study, a feature often seen in the loose and unstructured aspects of some Massively Open Online Courses" (para. 3).

While self-determination and self-direction are usually associated with the individual learner, they can thus also be cultivated within social learning environments. Social networking applications allow learners to join and to participate to varying degrees and at many levels with others. As Wheeler (2012) concludes, in line with Ryberg and Christiansen (2008), this fosters a trajectory from "entering by learning" through to "transcending by developing" (Wheeler, 2012, para. 2).

The Relevance of Participatory Literacy Skills

Conceptualizing learner self-determination within a heutagogical framework shifts the focus onto its interrelationship with participation and collaboration in social networked learning and highlights the need for participatory literacy skills in social networking spaces. Drawing on Jenkins' (2006) notion of "participatory cultures," that is formal and informal teamwork of the sort that occurs in social media, Hauck (2010) has argued that the ability to collaborate – and, in the process, to strengthen the

aforementioned capacity for critical reflection – is best developed through working together online in order to complete tasks and create and share new knowledge. Such sustained online collaboration is at the heart of cMOOCs. As [Cormier \(2010\)](#) states: "The connections and the comments is what the course is all about ... the discussions is what you took the course for."

One could therefore argue that participation emerges as both the means and the end of social networked learning and that MOOCs offer an ideal environment for self-determined learners who have decided that they want to come along for the ride but who have yet to develop the required participatory literacy skills. As mentioned above, those skills include attention, critical thinking, and analysis, as well as elements of creativity, reasoning, and collaboration (Pegrum, 2009). These are also the qualities [Downes \(2012\)](#) seems to have in mind when he stipulates that "by starting out with a *presumption* of a different set of skills, MOOCs explicitly foster and value these skills" (para. 14, emphasis in original). Thus he describes MOOCs as a sandpit for highly self-motivated learners who need to be put in touch with like-minded peers:

What we are trying to do with a MOOC is to create an environment where people who are more advanced reasoners, thinkers, motivators, arguers, and educators can practice their skills in a public way by interacting with each other. In such an environment, people can learn by watching and joining in. ([Downes, 2012](#), para. 17)

However the authors' experience of running the OT12 MOOC suggests that "interacting," "watching," and "joining in" cannot be assumed to simply happen. Indeed, the authors' perception was that assumptions about the skills learners would bring to the MOOC – their ability to take part in highly participatory and collaborative activities – were not necessarily matched by reality. Moreover, an understanding of that reality ought to have shaped more firmly the way that the MOOC was designed and delivered. After the MOOC had finished, one of the authors summarized the insights gained:

I get the sense that both learners and teachers are struggling to come to terms with the realities of self-determination in such an open environment. I recall that I felt uneasy about making postings that might seem too "teacherly" or directive and so held off. And some participants clearly had unrealistic expectations (e.g. that their work would be individually corrected by a facilitator). What they really needed were the skills and techniques that would ensure that a network of peers provided the comment and correction they aspired to.

An instructional designer running a MOOC on *Fundamentals of Online Learning* in early 2013 was less hesitant and more prescriptive in trying to control the group formation process. Several of the students – many of whom were educators and online learning experts themselves – started to tweet and post on their own blogs to document the "MOOC Mess." In her blog post, one participant ([Morrison, 2013](#)) reminds everybody that MOOCs are student-centric, not professor-centric and that in other classes she has taken, students have created [Facebook](#) groups, organized [Google Hangouts](#), and formed other online groups not because the instructor told them to, but because they wanted to. She concluded that "the whole experience of the MOOC is for students to drive the learning. ... It's spontaneous" (para. 16).

The dilemma described above shows that MOOC instructors/facilitators are faced with a somewhat daunting task and confirms the need for quite advanced participatory literacy skills for success in a MOOC. It also challenges the assumption that MOOCs are the place where learners can easily develop these skills. It is likely, though, that the different types of MOOCs that have emerged over the past 24 months require different degrees of these skills for learner success.

[Canning's \(2010\)](#) and [Blaschke's \(2012\)](#) progression from pedagogy, to andragogy, and then to heutagogy might be a helpful way to distinguish different types of MOOCs and, in particular, to pinpoint the levels of self-determination and participatory literacy required for success. Indeed, cMOOCs, with their emphasis on "creation, creativity, autonomy, and social networked learning" ([Siemens, 2012](#), para. 3) seem to be more in line with a heutagogical view of the learner. xMOOCs, on the other hand, could be interpreted as reflecting the pedagogical end of the framework. Consequently, the degree of self-determination required and the need to draw on one's participatory literacy skills increases, as learners move along the content-based, task-based, and networked-based continuum, or up a level on the pedagogy, andragogy, heutagogy pyramid. Figure 3 illustrates this idea.

The OT12 MOOC that forms the backdrop for this contribution was designed to be task-based and network-based. As a result, it constitutes a hybrid according to [Lane's \(2012\)](#) categorization, requiring a high degree of self-determination and participatory literacy.

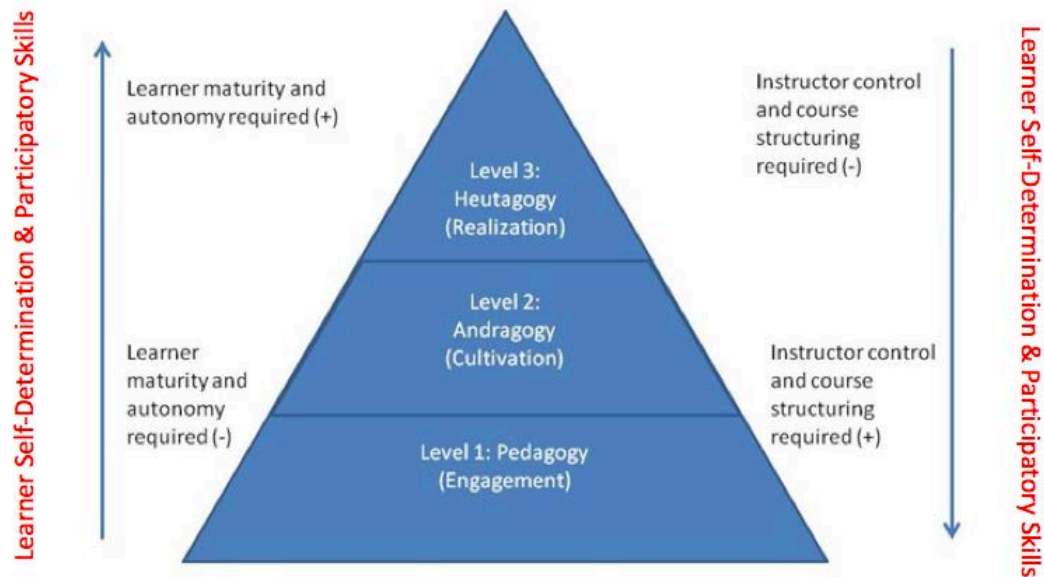


Figure 3. *The role of learner self-determination and participatory skills in the progression from pedagogy to andragogy and then to heutagogy (adapted from Blaschke, 2012, p. 60)*

(The above figure is an adaptation of a figure from "Heutagogy and Lifelong Learning: A Review of Heutagogical Practice and Self-Determined Learning" by L. M. Blaschke, 2012, *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 13(1), p. 60, available at <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1076/2087> under a [Creative Commons Attribution](#) license.)

OT12: Content, Purpose, and Participants

[OT12](#) was a MOOC on open translation tools and practices run by faculty at the OU's Department of Languages. It took place in Autumn 2012 over a period of 8 weeks and included an additional final week for evaluating the experience. OT12 was a course with stated aims, weekly readings, discussions, webinars with experts, and a series of tasks subtitled and translating OERs. No formal assessment was offered but a certificate of participation and a badge were available to those who took part. The course attracted just under 300 participants, although 600 registered and received bi-weekly e-mail digests.

Open translation practices rely on [crowdsourcing](#), usually by volunteer translators, in order to translate open resources such as [TED](#) talks and [Wikipedia](#) articles, as well as global blogging and citizen media projects such as [Global Voices](#). The tools of open translation include reference materials such as online dictionaries (e.g., [WordReference.com](#), which also includes a forum to consult with the community) and terminological databases (such as [IATE](#)); automatic translation tools such as the [Google Translator Toolkit](#); and translation workflow tools such as [Transifex](#), a platform for managing the crowdsourcing of text-based translations, and [Amara](#), a platform for subtitling videos.

OT12 was both free and open, hosted in [LabSpace](#), part of the [OpenLearn](#) platform, published under a CC license, and using mostly free and open tools (Amara and Transifex). Furthermore, the participants engaged in the translation of OERs, partly for practical reasons related to copyright but, more importantly, as an introduction to the philosophy of open education.

In terms of [Lane's \(2012\)](#) categorization, OT12 can be considered a task-based MOOC, as the emphasis was on skills development (including skills in using open translation tools) through the completion of translation tasks. Yet it also had a strong community element, as most translation tasks were collaborative. As an exploratory course, OT12 drew heavily on this community of like-minded, relatively knowledgeable individuals, which included, among others, professional and volunteer translators, translation learners and professors, and language teachers. Since the facilitators relied heavily on the knowledge and expertise of the participants, they were aware of the dangers of adopting a prescriptive, top-down, teacher-centric approach. For instance, the demand for Brazilian Portuguese/English and French/English in addition to the originally intended Spanish/English pairing was quickly accommodated by providing space for different translation subgroups.

The first week's activities included a language profile questionnaire (196 respondents) to enable MOOC facilitators and participants to find out more about each other. The main language(s) of the participants were: Spanish (32%), English (22%), Brazilian Portuguese (11%), Greek (9%), French (7%), and Italian (6%). There were also one or two first language speakers of 15 other languages. Most participants were interested in translating into English or Spanish, with some wanting to translate into Brazilian Portuguese, French, German, and Italian. Over two thirds (68%) of respondents rated themselves as highly proficient in their second language, level C1 (29%) or C2 (39%) of the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#). Most participants had experience of translating, professionally or otherwise (see Figure 4).

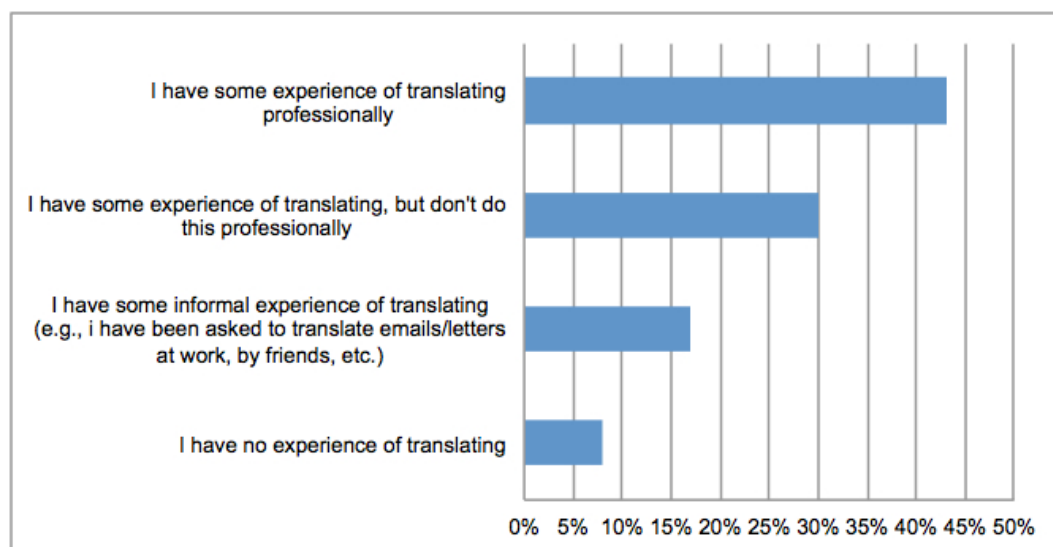


Figure 4. *Translating experience of OT12 participants*

The picture that emerges from the language profile questionnaire confirms [Downes' \(2012\)](#) claim that MOOC participants enter with a certain amount of preparation. As can be expected in a translation MOOC, participants were highly skilled in at least two languages, and had some experience of translating, with nearly half of them having done so professionally. In sum: the majority of those who joined OT12 seemed to possess the "different set of skills" that MOOCs explicitly foster and value and that they were therefore "ready to take responsibility when they are given responsibilities" ([Downes, 2012](#), para. 14). Two further surveys helped to gather data that would provide further insights into the initial hypothesis about the interdependence between learner self-determination and participatory literacy skills in MOOCs with a focus on OT12.

Methods

In addition to the language profile questionnaire completed by 198 participants during the first week of the course, participants were also invited in Week 1 to complete a pre-course survey to ascertain their reasons for joining the MOOC, their expectations and the challenges they envisaged, as well as their previous experience of working online and collaboratively. This pre-course survey received 56 responses, and a post-course survey made available during Week 8 was completed by 35 participants. Given the fact that the course was open and that participation varied from week to week according to participants' interests and availability, it is impossible to establish a response rate for the surveys.

Both surveys contained a number of open-ended questions designed to obtain rich data from respondents. Open-ended responses were coded according to emerging categories. Where several points were made within the same comment entry, these were coded separately. Hence the number of items coded exceeds the number of comments made.

Pre-Course Survey

Reasons for Joining the OT12 MOOC

Respondents were able to indicate more than one reason for joining the OT12 MOOC. The most popular reason, cited by 73% of respondents, was to learn more about translation, whether learning to use

translation tools or simply developing translation skills, which would put OT12 at the intersection between content- and task-based MOOCs according to [Lane \(2012\)](#) and towards the pedagogy end of our framework (Figure 3). Less popular reasons for joining OT12 were using the MOOC as an opportunity for professional or work-related development (18%) or taking part in OT12 as an adjunct to or a continuation of a formal course of study (16%). The latter group might have been interested in content acquisition and expecting to be "taught stuff" as [Downes \(2012\)](#) puts it, which would put them towards the lower end of the self-determination and participatory literacy skills scale. An interest in open tools and educational resources or in second language learning was selected as a reason by just under a third of respondents (29%).

In terms of goals, the majority of respondents (71%) identified learning more about translation tools, techniques, and skills as their goal for the course. However, small minorities mentioned goals other than translation, such as learning more about MOOCs, open tools, and online pedagogy, developing second language and literacy skills, or gaining personal confidence.

The survey responses showed that most OT12 participants (71%) were new to MOOCs, with about a third knowing nothing at all about them (34%) and just under one third (29%) claiming some awareness of the term, even though half of those admitted that their awareness was a result of registering for OT12. Only three respondents had prior experience of online courses, but not of MOOCs. It can be concluded from these figures that learning about translation was the main driver for joining the MOOC, and that the prospect of acquiring translation skills motivated participants to engage with a relatively unfamiliar environment.

A Successful MOOC Experience

The "hands-on" aspect of the OT12 MOOC seemed to be one of its key attractions. Asked to name the factors they thought would make for a successful MOOC experience, 89.1% of respondents pointed to the opportunity to use and evaluate different open translation tools. Nearly as significant (cited by 85.5% of respondents) was the level of guidance and support they anticipated receiving from MOOC organizers. This reinforces the emerging impression of their capacity for self-determination and ability to draw on participatory literacy skills and confirms that "interacting," "watching," and "joining in" cannot be assumed to simply happen in a MOOC. Other criteria of success were clarity and coherence of pedagogic design (83.6%) and the look and technical features of the site itself (52.7%). The value placed on course and site design is noteworthy as it supports [Daniel's \(2012\)](#) comment that "at the heart of MOOCs are the platforms that enable the various operations involved in offering a MOOC to be done effectively" (para. 34). It is noteworthy that the prospect of working collaboratively with partners, a key element of social networked learning, appealed to roughly two thirds (67.3%) of OT12 participants, even though most respondents' expectations seemed to be more in line with a content transmission approach (73% had stated that their main reason for joining the course was learning more about translation tools and developing translation skills).

Potential Challenges

Managing their time (38%) and their workload (20%) were identified as challenges by some respondents, as were learning online and using technology (22%), and second language proficiency (11%). Among those mentioning workload as a challenge, some intended to work as hard as they could (21%), while others wanted to follow the instructions of the MOOC organizers step by step (12%), thus representing opposite ends of the self-determination spectrum.

For 21% of respondents, technology was the greatest barrier, whether working online and navigating the Internet or specifically working with online translation tools. Working collaboratively was seen as a problem for 10% of the respondents, either because they preferred working independently or because of anxiety at the prospect of working with more expert peers.

Collaboration

A large group of respondents (37%) were looking for help from their peers with aspects of translation either as a process or as a profession, and 25% were willing to share with others their academic knowledge or practical and professional experience of translation. The high level of translation expertise in the group corroborates [Downes' \(2012\)](#) observation that MOOC participants tend to come prepared. At the same time, it also highlights yet again the "pedagogy" end of [Canning's \(2010\)](#) pyramid – that is, participants' tacit assumptions about knowledge transmission (access to knowledge from their peers or

the chance to impart their own knowledge for the benefit of others) rather than socially constructed knowledge.

Participants' expectations of the OT12 organizers seemed – with hindsight – largely realistic, given that the course was structured around a series of tasks to complete. 25% of respondents indicated that they expected general guidance on the aims of the course and what they were supposed to do, in line with traditional pedagogy but at odds with the more exploratory approach intended by the organizers. Around 10% of respondents expected organizers to solve problems, particularly technical ones, and an equal number hoped to receive feedback on their translations.

Outcomes

Asked what, for them, would be a successful outcome of their participation in the MOOC, a quarter of participants chose learning more about open translation tools, while a similar percentage indicated that they simply wanted to learn or to complete the course and activities (15%). The full list of reasons is illustrated in Figure 5. On the basis of these results, one might conclude that even specialized MOOCs such as OT12 will attract both a core of quite focused participants and a wider nebula of those who may just come along for the ride.

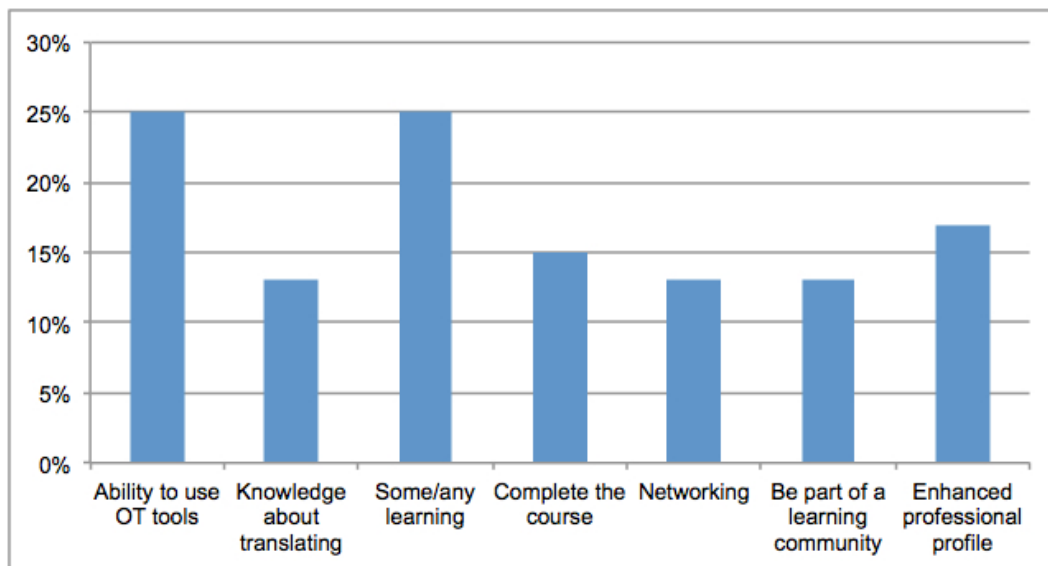


Figure 5. Successful outcomes of OT12

Post-Course Survey

General Satisfaction Feedback

Most respondents were clear about the purpose and learning outcomes of the OT12 MOOC (very clear 66%; partly clear 34%), and most felt their expectations had been fully (46%) or partly (51%) met. Among those whose expectations had only been partly met, personal reasons and lack of time were mentioned by half of the respondents, while the other half expected more guidance from course facilitators, more support from peers, and less emphasis on the "openness" part than on the translation part.

Four respondents cited the need for more support not only from facilitators but also from peers, lamenting that *"there were learning opportunities that we missed out on"* because of lack of collaboration. Four others noted difficulties caused by their own reluctance to contribute, due either to lack of confidence (*"in part because I am a bit reserved"*) or to lack of knowledge (*"sometimes I felt outside of the group not because of the group itself but because I haven't got much experience about translation to share"*). Only one comment was made on difficulties coping with the technology.

Lack of time to engage with all aspects of the course was a recurrent theme (10 comments) already identified in the expectations survey. However, when asked to suggest improvements, 25 respondents asked for more tasks, readings, and seminars. Such expectations, together with the requests for more

guidance, are characteristics of content-based MOOCs ([Lane, 2012](#)), which sit at the "pedagogy" end of the framework (Figure 3) and offer a more traditional learning experience.

Four respondents felt that better course outcomes relied upon participants becoming more engaged and active (*"the main improvement will come as people get more accustomed to doing serious collaboration online"*) and taking more responsibility for their own learning (*"if we had organized ourselves (perhaps setting up a team leader/s) we could have achieved and enjoyed the experience a lot more"*). These comments show that some participants were fully aware of the self-determination and participatory literacy required to achieve a satisfactory learning experience, even if they did not possess such skills themselves.

It is interesting to note that most participants had identified *"learning about translation"* as their main motivation for joining the course, which echoes findings from the expectations survey and would place OT12 among content-based MOOCs ([Lane, 2012](#)) in terms of learner expectations. Yet by the end of the course most found *"open tools and resources,"* explored in the context of dedicated translation tasks, the most enjoyable part of OT12 (23 comments).

Sharing with others (mentioned by six respondents) and the networking opportunities offered by OT12 (mentioned by five) were also identified as enjoyable aspects of the course, and an equal number of responses (five) in this category referred to the value of the synchronous online discussions. These all confirm the notion that a high proportion of the value of the MOOC to participants lies in the chance to engage with others, which points to the network-based aspect of OT12 and, once more, its hybrid dimension.

Levels of Participation

About half of the respondents had contributed fewer than 10 posts during the course, while another 14 had contributed more than 10 (six of them more than 20). Predictably, only four respondents reported not having contributed any posts, a reflection of the fact that those who were more engaged with the course and followed it to the end were the most likely to have completed the survey.

The fact that only six participants had contributed more than 20 posts during OT12 suggests that OT12 has probably operated more on the task-based/content-based interface of [Lane's \(2012\)](#) categorization and was only to a lesser degree also a network-based MOOC. The results reported in the next two sections confirm this.

Most respondents had taken part in the subtitling activity (89%), and the majority had used the translation management tool. Lack of time was the main reason identified by those who had not.

Working Collaboratively

The majority of respondents (85%) stated that their experience of working collaboratively with partners had been positive, although many added that they had not taken up the opportunity of collaborating with colleagues. Almost half of those who considered the experience positive (12) viewed sharing ideas with others and benefitting from other participants' knowledge and experience as a beneficial form of collaboration. Only one participant referred to collaboration in the tasks in negative terms, pointing out that *"different translation styles result in lack of consistency in the text."*

Impact of the MOOC

Respondents were asked to select all the benefits that they felt they had gained from taking part in the MOOC, and their responses are set out in Figure 6. It is worth pointing out the minority who felt they had acquired online communication skills and gained confidence by taking part in OT12, hence increasing their participatory literacy skills.

In a small number of cases, participants felt that the course had not met their expectations either in terms of content or technical support. A few concluded that there was too much freedom for participants to decide how much to do and when, a view that suggests that they were not ready for a heutagogical approach to learning. The majority, however, found that the course allowed them to discover new tools and practices, extend their networks (*"I found someone who belongs to the same organization as I do on a different continent! That was a nice surprise!"*), and benefit from the knowledge of others (*"To see one of the guys I cite on my papers as my colleague! So democratic!"*).

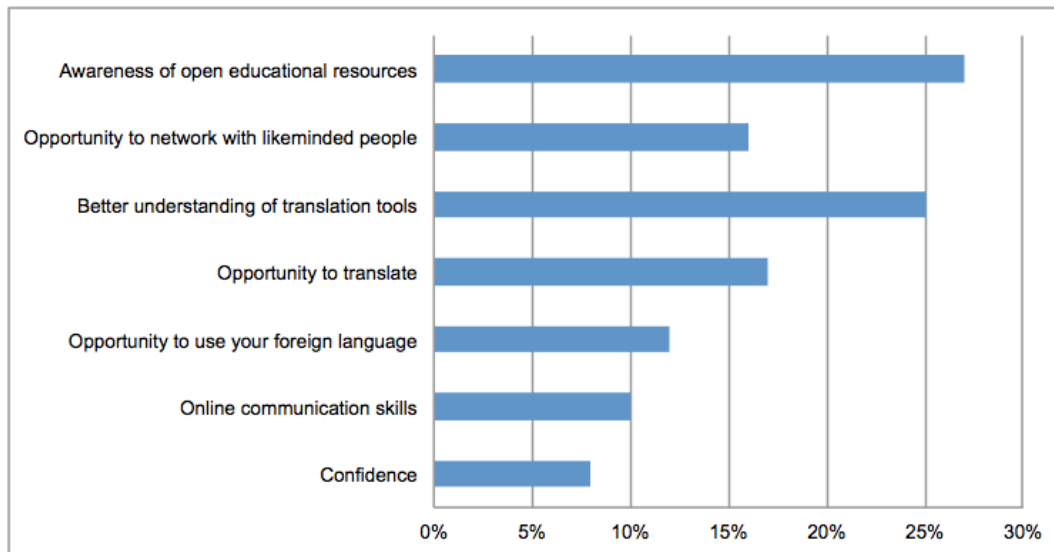


Figure 6. Students' perceived greatest benefits from taking part in OT12

For some participants, the experience of taking part in the OT12 MOOC provided unexpected benefits. For one student the course had prompted a willingness "to take up some voluntary translation on a small scale," with another taking "the chance to get myself in as a translator at one [non-governmental organization]." One participant found an immediate application for some of the knowledge gained ("I watched the online seminar about translation quality which helped me with my dissertation topic!") while others learned something about themselves through taking part in the course ("The helplessness and uneasy feeling of having one's work 'altered' or edited"; "I made some discoveries about my own life and opinions").

Preliminary Conclusions

OT12 was initially designed as a task-based MOOC with elements of network-based/cMOOCs. It was not primarily a content-based MOOC as those who joined had to engage with its participatory elements, even if only by taking part in the group translation activities designed to use open translation tools. Beyond these tasks, however, OT12 also included genuine opportunities for networking, which for some participants was an important aspect of the learning experience. Moreover, the OT12 team left the participants in no doubt about the exploratory dimension of the whole event, and for this reason, the authors conclude that OT12 was in fact a hybrid, with a strong task-based element. Lane (2012) herself stresses that the goals characteristic of each type of MOOC in her categorization – content transmission and acquisition, skills developed through the completion of tasks, socially constructed knowledge – are present in all of them. Yet the challenges this creates in terms of learning design for MOOC facilitators and in terms of self-determination and participatory literacy skills for the learners remain – until now – underexplored, if not unacknowledged.

The results reported in this paper illustrate that MOOCs such as OT12, which are primarily task-based (Lane, 2012), assume more self-determination and a higher degree of participatory literacy than those with a content-based focus. They also indicate that participants who are not sufficiently motivated and do not know how to collaborate online as reflected, for example, in knowing how to trigger feedback and support from peers might feel let down by the learning experience.

Downes' (2012) claim that "you decide that you want to participate, you decide how to participate, then you participate. If you're not motivated, then *you're not in the MOOC*" (para. 9, emphasis in original) increasingly reflects the reality of the original MOOCs, the cMOOCs, or networked-based MOOCs only.

In line with Wiley (2012a), one must therefore ask how "open" MOOCs really are. What will happen to students who are not sufficiently self-determined and skilled? Will their lack in participatory literacy prevent them from experiencing the journey from "entering by learning" through to "transcending by developing"? For example, the anxiety reported by some OT12 participants at the prospect of working with more expert peers shows that while access to experts might be an advantage of many MOOCs, it

can also be problematic, if not an outright obstacle to learner self-determination, particularly for those who do not come equipped with the required participatory literacy skills.

If MOOCs are more than game-changers in the education landscape and are playing a different game altogether (Downes, 2012), learners either need to come equipped to play, or need to be informed about what is required to play successfully and where and how they can acquire the requisite skills. In network-based MOOCs, success depends on creativity, reasoning and collaboration. Yet those aspects of participatory literacy are less crucial in task-based MOOCs and even less so in content-based MOOCs, where attention, critical thinking, and analysis are likely to be the dominant skills required.

Recommendations

Managing the expectations of potential participants is essential for MOOCs to deliver a successful learning experience. The evidence of OT12 suggests that it would be helpful for participants if those designing and delivering MOOCs would provide them with:

- a clear statement of the nature of the MOOC and what students will be required to do to take part in the MOOC;
- a transparent definition of what success in the MOOC means for the instructors and to what extent it depends on visible/tangible participation – that is, participant interaction and collaboration (acknowledging that the notion of what constitutes success in the MOOC is an individual one, and that learning can take many shapes and is more about transformation than acquisition);
- an explanation of what participation entails, including:
 - clear communication of the skills required to participate in the MOOC, and advice on how and where the participatory skills required for success in the MOOC can be acquired;
 - skillful facilitation that models suitable behaviors that participants can reproduce (networking, summarizing, eliciting feedback, threading, etc.).

While Downes (2012) rightly notes that "it isn't about *teaching* these skills in a MOOC", and that "suggesting that this is or ought to be the function of a MOOC is to misunderstand it" (para. 16, emphasis in original), the OT12 experience makes clear that the skills required for success in a MOOC need to be made more explicit to participants, and that such skills will vary depending on the pedagogical approach taken in the MOOC. Only once those factors have been acknowledged will it be "reasonable to assume they [participants] will learn to take responsibility when they are given responsibilities" (Downes, 2012). Only then can learners make informed and realistic choices as to whether or not they should join the MOOC.

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