

A Co-design Methodology for Blended Teacher Professional Development in Contexts of Mass Displacement

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Summary: Teachers working in challenging contexts of mass displacement need both expert and peer support. This article shares a co-design methodology being used to develop and test the use of what we are calling Massive Online Open Collaborations (MOOCs) which involve blended learning approaches for teacher professional development.

Keywords: Mass Displacement, Teacher Professional Development, Co-design Methodology, MOOCs, Lebanon

Background

As emergencies caused by conflicts and disasters become more protracted, the need to protect, promote, and fulfil the right to education becomes ever more pressing. Mass displacement strains state education services of the host country, creating an enormous demand for teachers who are appropriately trained to deal with the complex educational challenges they face (Ring & West, 2015).

Teachers are in the classroom responding to the needs of learners every day. They see what works and invent solutions in situations where conventional methods of teaching and learning are not suitable. The challenge for teachers is that they are often required to manage on their own, with few opportunities to know what other teachers are doing in similar situations. Teachers of refugees, who are either refugees themselves or the host country nationals, need support to navigate an unfamiliar context for which they are not usually trained (Burns & Lawrie, 2015).

How can we respond to these situations? How do we scale up effective approaches to meet the demands for education in emergencies (EiE)? In this paper, we argue that one of the most effective and evidence-led approaches is to use digital technology to facilitate teachers sharing of knowledge and skills, and their experiences of what works in their own challenging contexts.

The Study

Our project investigates a co-design research model that collects teachers' and researchers' current knowledge about effective practices in EiE, generalises and shares this knowledge, and then supports teachers in recontextualising it to generate local versions of practices that have been tested by other teachers.

Scaled-up online and blended learning is central to this approach. We use the form of a MOOC, but not in a way that is typically understood. MOOCs are usually defined as Massive Open Online Courses, which deliver online learning to mass participants from a distant authority. We re-envisage the MOOC as a Massive Open Online *Collaboration*. We show how MOOC platforms can be used to engage teachers as researchers (Laurillard, 2008), designing, adapting, and testing learning designs and techniques in the classroom, collecting data, and sharing what they learn with each other.

This is the approach that the Future Education research team within the RELIEF Centre at University College London is currently using in Lebanon.¹ We use a co-design approach that:

- works with teachers and education leaders in local communities to elicit their current experiences and expertise in providing EiE (Pherali et al., forthcoming);
- conceives of the classroom as a living laboratory, where teachers conduct experiments, observe problems, investigate what is needed, design solutions, and evaluate outcomes;
- engages these teachers to help us articulate and generalise their practice for others, to identify the successes, the problems, and the changes they made;
- co-designs the curriculum for a MOOC to share these practices with many more teachers working in formal or non-formal contexts, public, private, or voluntary.

We build the MOOC together by conducting participatory workshops to co-design learning activities and identify places to film teachers demonstrating effective practices. Working teachers from the community therefore become teacher-educators via the MOOC. The rich video resources and collaborative activities designed around them encourage other teachers to test new ideas in their own teaching and learning spaces.

A purely online course can be difficult for overstretched teachers and may have additional challenges related to fragile infrastructure, such as poor internet connectivity, electricity, or equipment. The first phase of the co-design research is therefore to create face-to-face support in collaboration with two partner universities in Lebanon² by blending the MOOC into their existing teacher professional development activities. This approach means we can anticipate the challenges facing the purely online participant teachers who may otherwise drop out.

The second phase is to embed the blended MOOC-based programme into their existing teacher training courses to create a path to accreditation, which is critical for refugee teachers. This phase will be assessed, discussed, and implemented based on the evaluation of the first phase.

The ultimate aim of this co-design research is that this investment from the community will motivate the continuous cycle of redesign to sustain the MOOC as a collaborative online community of teacher-researchers, pooling evidence of what works from individual classrooms into a dynamic process of collaborative innovation.

For the first phase we held four co-design workshops in Beirut and Beqa'a, and a three-day workshop in London, bringing together Lebanon's teachers and teacher-educators from private, public and NGO schools, public and private universities, and government departments responsible for teacher education. Through the co-design process, the workshop participants agreed on the following themes for the MOOC:

- imagining the 'ideal' teaching and learning space;
- considering various existing learning spaces practitioners work in;
- moving from existing learning and teaching spaces towards transformative learning and teaching spaces for unknowable futures; and
- understanding how to deal with the limitations and challenges teachers face in their own contexts of mass displacement.

This mix of stakeholders creates value in and of itself because their activities are easily siloed, particularly in a context with internal political divisions where even small-scale successes are not normally shared. By co-designing a MOOC, the stakeholder representatives worked together to create shared ownership. For example, since the co-design process began, co-designer Lebanese American University (LAU) has broken new ground by hosting colleagues from Lebanese University (LU) for a blended learning workshop. This supports cross-sector, technology enhanced learning since LAU and LU train teachers respectively for the private and public sectors.

The filming of practice for the MOOC includes teachers and teacher trainees from NGO schools, private, public, and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools. Each teacher reflects on how they have adapted to the challenges they face, and shares how they achieved their aims, as well as their responses to failures. When the MOOC runs,

activities encourage participants to adapt these ideas to their own situation, articulate and refine their pedagogy, peer review each other's ideas, and report back with evidence of what works.

The Research

In terms of collecting data, MOOC platforms automate the collection of reliable digital data on local effectiveness in many forms. Available data sets include enrolments, learning activity participation and completion, quizzes, video use, submissions, peer reviews, and discussion contributions. When external tools are embedded in MOOCs as collaborative activities, participants can share their own resources or build resources with other teachers. Through such a method, MOOCs enable the crowdsourcing of effective practices. Participants often gain as much learning from peers as from the official resources (Laurillard, Kennedy, Wang, Escorcía, & Hooker, 2018).

Through the different activities in the MOOC, the participants are encouraged to share and reflect on their practices and engage in reflexive comments and discussions. These reflections and discussions are documented through external tools such as Padlets.³ All this data will be interpreted and shared through reports that are open source and accessible to practitioners and policymakers, and will inform further development of the MOOC, and other resources for teacher training.

The methodological approach extends our understanding of value creation within MOOCs at many levels. Drawing on the work of Wenger, Trayner and De Laat (2011) we can see that *immediate value* can be gained from simply engaging in the social learning community. *Potential value* involves new knowledge, which becomes *applied value* when put into practice in the classroom. When the teacher collects evidence of their own learners' progress, *realized value* is produced, and when participation causes teachers to reassess their institution's entire approach this becomes *transformative value*. In addition, we use classroom observations and follow-up interviews, in the form of value creation stories, to discover what happens after the MOOC has been completed.

Evidence from co-designed teacher professional development MOOCs such as *Blended Learning Essentials* (University of Leeds, & UCL, n.d.) and *Becoming Better Teachers* (British Council, & UCL, n.d.) shows that this approach works (British Council, 2017; Deepwell, 2017; Laurillard, Kennedy, Wang, Escorcía, & Hooker, 2018). To turn the MOOC into a research tool, we must facilitate and monitor teacher sharing and adaptation of resources, along with their own evidence of learner success. Digital tools together with our model of co-design and embedding of the MOOC within existing practices will enable an ongoing relationship with participants, enabling us to investigate this method of collecting the evidence of what works in education, based on data provided by teachers-as-researchers.

Conclusion

This approach is a model that can be used in any EiE situation so that we continually build on what we have already learned. In Lebanon, we used the MOOC to orchestrate the developing expertise of teachers. Our continued research will advance our understanding of this innovative methodological approach.

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Endnotes

¹ The RELIEF Centre is a transdisciplinary research collaboration that focuses on one of the world's pressing challenges of the moment: how to build a prosperous and inclusive future for communities affected by mass displacement. The Centre's research focuses on how we can measure prosperity and growth in Lebanon—a country that is experiencing a massive displacement of people—moving beyond indices like GDP to include measures of wellbeing, health, employment, and education.

² The private Lebanese American University (LAU) and the public Lebanese University (LU).

³ Padlets are online pinboards for sharing ideas, see <https://padlet.com/gallery>.