



Supporting Teachers Moving Online, using a MOOC, During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: Following campus closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many Ministries of Education around the world requested teachers to move their teaching online. This case study reflects on how the Commonwealth of Learning responded to requests from two countries to provide support in pedagogical and curricular change for online learning in this process. A Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform was used to upskill 11,568 teachers in two regions of the Commonwealth. Analytics from within the course, together with pre-, mid- and end-course surveys of participants' perceptions indicated that while there was, and is, scope for improvement, the short course largely reached its objective of providing immediate support on an introductory level and that the approach adopted was largely appropriate for the purpose.

Keywords: COVID-19, online teaching, OER, MOOC.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the education of millions of learners around the globe. However, very few education systems and their teachers were prepared for the sudden transition to online learning that resulted (Kanwar, 2020). This article focuses on two requests, from the Ministries of Education in Fiji and Trinidad and Tobago, respectively, to the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), to support their teachers in moving online. It explores how COL responded, in partnership with its regional centre, the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD), which is hosted by the University of the South Pacific. We developed and offered a short course called *OER for Online Learning: An Introduction* (OER4OL), as a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to address this need, and here we reflect on this work and what we learned from the process.

Context and Background

With the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic in March 2020, most school campuses were closed. Governments in most developing and developed countries consequently recommended moving teaching and learning online. The OER4OL short course, therefore, responded to a Ministry-level request for short-term support for teachers who were struggling to support continuous learning during school campus closures. The course sought to provide practical advice in using OER and online resources and applications rather than to explore the theory of online learning or guidance on the use of a specific Learning Management System, since in most countries no common online platform was in place.



Planning and Design

Due to the need to support teachers before the start of the new school year, there was very little time for detailed planning of this course, a pressure also shared by others (Ashman, et al, 2020). The new course outline was conceptualised on May 7, 2020 and the course and initial content were launched on May 15, 2020. Simultaneously with the development of the content, discussions were held on how best to provide mentoring support and to monitor and evaluate implementation of the course. The four units of the course were developed and released progressively over the four weeks of the initial implementation.

Technology

Topics in the short course were introduced by short videos followed by content-based activities embedded in downloadable PowerPoint presentations. Each activity was linked to a discussion forum. Participants were also directed to additional reading materials and/or web resources. Assessment included active participation in discussion forums, an online quiz and an assignment comprising a lesson plan using OER, which could be taught without requiring teachers and learners to be in the same place at the same time. Support for discussion forums was provided by local mentors over the four weeks of the first iteration of the course, which ran from Friday May 15 to Sunday June 24, 2020.

The course was developed using MooKIT¹, which was developed and is supported by the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India. Technical support was available internally but where required the platform designers were contacted for advice.

Iterations of the Short Course

As noted, the initial request for support came from the Ministry of Education in Fiji, who actively promoted the course among teachers in that country. While the first iteration of the course was in process in response to the request from Fiji, COL responded to a request from the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago to create a second iteration of the course. Feedback from the second iteration was so positive that the Ministry requested a further iteration to try to reach all the teachers in Trinidad and Tobago in need of support. Over the three iterations – one focused on the request from Fiji and two focused on the requests from Trinidad and Tobago – some 11,568 teachers and others participated. Both the second and third iterations of the course attracted participants also from Fiji who had missed the first offering of the course. Having run three iterations of the course, and with the third iteration involving three cohorts, we thought it would be interesting to explore comparative trends in engagement and feedback.

Literature Review

Several years ago, Moon (2010) warned of the need to train more teachers by using distance education methods because the limited capacity of traditional bricks and mortar provision alone would not allow us to train enough teachers to achieve universal access to education. As observed by Hollands and Tirthali (2014), MOOCs seemed to have the potential for cost-effective training provision at scale,

¹ <https://www.mookit.in/>

but a few other factors needed to be addressed if that potential was to be realised. Also, in 2014, Kanwar and Balaji argued “the real advantages of MOOCs for development would be in skilling at scale with speed” (p. 7). As illustrated in a review of MOOCs and Open Education around the world (Bonk et al, 2015), a diverse range of practices has emerged, and design, development and implementation of MOOCs continues to evolve (Zhang et al, 2019). However, for our current purposes, Kilgore et al (2015), observed that MOOCs could be used successfully for professional development, for participants across multiple institutions, if designed and developed appropriately. In India, for example, the National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS) took up the challenge of teacher development at scale, training 1.4 million untrained elementary school teachers in a single cohort over an 18-month period starting in October, 2017. NIOS made use of a combination of a MOOC, centre-based support, free-to-air videos and mobile applications to reach these teachers (Kharbanda, 2018; Rajabalee, Dundas & Singh, 2020). In a recently completed long-term impact study of a MOOC in technology enabled learning, Perryman (2020) identifies four impact pathways which can be explored: implementation of new learning leading to improved learner outcomes; influence on colleagues’ changed practices; influence on institution leaders and developing practice through increased networking. It is the latter impact that is the focus of the current discussion as the others require further longitudinal research. However, as noted by Stracke (2017) earlier, the key metric for a MOOC should probably be the extent to which it meets the expectations and needs of the participants themselves. The OER4OL short course sought to initiate open discussion and sharing rather than limiting participants only to the initial contents provided by the course leaders. This is in line with recent recommendations for teacher development. For example, Sayed and Bulgrin (2020), reflecting on comparative case studies of teacher development approaches in Africa, argue:

A new approach to professional development is needed – one which conceives of development as “learning”. Framing professional development as learning privileges the idea of teachers as members of a profession worthily engaged in continuous development of skills and knowledge throughout their professional career. This frames development as within the agency of teachers who not only identify what they need, but also what is appropriate to their own learning (p. v).

Methods

Since we needed to accommodate relatively large numbers and wished to foster cross-pollination of ideas through active participant engagement (Walji, et al, 2016), and encourage the participation of women working in environments requiring maximum flexibility (Almuhamna, 2018), and also because we needed the course to be free, open, mobile friendly and device agnostic, a MOOC seemed an appropriate mechanism for the course to take. We also desired to exploit fully the opportunity of having a diverse range of participants (although focused on and marketed within two particular countries, once opened, the platform was open to anybody, anywhere and participants from 87 countries enrolled).

It was important not only to help teachers think about how to guide learners’ independent use of prescribed textbooks, supplied or endorsed by the relevant Ministry of Education, but also to foster engagement with OER to strengthen inclusion and equity. We recognise that how we shape that engagement will affect the degree to which we achieve our objectives (Veletsianos, 2020) and how we mediate engagement with OER, and with the ideas and opinions of others in that process, reflects our own assumptions about the nature of openness and knowledge creation (Alevizou, 2015). If we wish

to influence pedagogy, then it is important that teachers engaged in a MOOC exploring OER, themselves create and share OER as part of the process (Hendricks, 2020).

In addition, we needed to ensure that the scope of the course was manageable for teachers already under great pressure to adapt to new circumstances – hence it needed to provide “an introduction” or “gateway” only on which more substantive engagements could be built subsequently (Czerniewicz, et al, 2014; Karunananayaka & Naidu, 2020).

As noted previously, the short course was designed, developed and implemented over a very short period. We were concerned that participants should actively engage with resources and applications and then share lessons of experience and feedback with their peers (and mentors). The course was divided into four units of learning of about three hours expected duration, each of which followed a similar sequence:

- Watching a short introductory overview of the content
- Downloading a PowerPoint with key activities and embedded links to useful resources
- Sharing lessons of experience in one or more discussion forums
- Sharing a summary of key lessons and sharing of an additional consolidating resource, such as a reworked OER, an example lesson plan, or a set of guidelines for remote/online teaching.

Course contents:

Unit 1: Using prescribed learning resources

Unit 2: Using OER

Unit 3: Learner and learning support

Unit 4: Managing assessment and feedback.

This paper focuses on what was learned from offering the course.

Results

The short time available and the pressure to address an immediate need, required a pragmatic response. Such an approach is characterised by a focus on action and change (Goldkuhl, 2012), and that highlights what we wanted to achieve through evaluation of the short course: to determine what worked well and resonated with participants’ needs and also where we needed to improve the course for future participants. This study lent itself to a mixed method approach to review the relationship between the course, the mentors and participants with the aim of evaluating the course through the key stakeholders’ engagement and perceptions (the participants themselves). This strategy provided opportunities to do in-depth analysis of the programme using various data collection instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), including surveys, teachers’ guided reflections, forum postings, direct observation of artefacts created and shared and even unsolicited emails, through which detailed information was acquired, and an applied social research process (Yin, 2014). However, the short course is still very much a work in progress so the findings we present here are considered preliminary and formative.

Instruments and Data Collection

The data collection instruments included, pre-, mid- and end- course surveys, observation of student engagement in discussion forums, review of examples of OER created by the participants, participants' reflective "stories" on their experience as well as data analytics available within the platform. The pre- and end- course surveys focused on collecting demographic data, as well as data about prior experiences perceptions and expectations, and variations of these surveys have been used in multiple projects. The mid-course survey was designed specifically to link with the overall purpose of the course. One of our key goals in this short orientation course was to shift participants' belief systems about learning and teaching towards a more participatory and sharing culture, and we did this by example. For instance, we asked participants to, openly and freely, share their work in the course with their peers so they could all benefit from one another's thinking. For the achievement of certification, we set hurdle requirements, such as share a lesson plan for comment and then submit a revised version as an assignment, the revised version being acknowledged for credit rather than a grade being assigned, while encouraging participants to provide feedback on the work of others.

The idea behind this survey was to get a sense of participants' beliefs about learning and teaching, education more generally, but especially about open educational practices (i.e., collaborative engagement with OERs and their creation, use and repurposing for different contexts (Ehlers, 2011), in order to be able to ascertain what we need to do now and, in the future, to shift those perceptions and perspectives towards more openness.

All surveys were optional and participants were assured that while the survey responses would be used for research and development purposes, their personal information would be protected as any reporting would be anonymised.

Population and Sample

The population for the study was all participants who engaged with the course over the three iterations offered –1695 (Iteration 1 – Fiji+), 1114 (Iteration 2 – Trinidad and Tobago+), 8759 (Iteration 3 – Trinidad and Tobago+) – a total of 11,568 participants (inclusive of the course leaders and mentors). Due to the larger numbers anticipated for the third iteration but the need to reach as many teachers as possible before the start of the new school year, participants were organised by the Ministry into cohorts of about 2500 in size and brought into the programme every two weeks. However, no one was forced to exit the course after their two weeks was over and the course remained open for completion for another three weeks after the third cohort were due to complete.

Table 1 summarises the number of survey responses received.

Table 1: Survey responses

	Pre-course	Mid-course	End-course
Iteration 1 Fiji+	587 (34.6%)	95 (5.6%)	191 (11.3%)
Iteration 2 Trinidad and Tobago + 1	145 (13%)	157 (14%)	269 (24.1%)
Iteration 3 Trinidad and Tobago + 2	2778 (32%)	2003 (23%)	1623 (18.5%)
	3510 (30.3%)	2255 (19.5%)	2083 (18%)

Data Analysis

Given the introductory nature and limited scope of the course, we felt that a simple statistical analysis using tools already available in the MOOC platform or within the survey platforms used (Survey Monkey and Lime Survey) would be appropriate to analyse the quantitative data. While for the qualitative data, we examined open-ended responses and identified recurring themes.

Findings and Discussion

Findings from In-platform Data Analytics

Iteration 1 had 53.1% female participation, with most participants aged 21-50 and with graduate qualifications. There were 1,967 forums and 3,928 comments.

Iteration 2 had 58% female participation, with most participants aged 21-50 and with graduate qualifications. There were 356 forums and 4,525 comments

Iteration 3 had 79% female participation, again, with most participants aged 21-50 and with graduate qualifications. There were 10,930 forums and 81,835 comments

Findings from Pre-course Survey (demographics and expectations)

There were 3,510 responses to the pre-course survey, representing 30.3% of the participants enrolled.

The findings of the pre-course survey are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of responses to pre-course survey

Number of responses	3,510	% of population	30.3
	Iteration 1 (Fiji+) %	Iteration 2 (T&T+) %	Iteration 3 (T&T+) %
English as first language	36.79	64.32	96
Connection to Internet wired/wireless (Home/Office)	66.38	85.5	91.49
Mobile Internet available	42.71	44.27	44.22
No experience of supporting learners outside of the physical classroom	27.43	18.55	19.43
Less than 8 weeks' experience of supporting learners outside of the physical classroom	39.38	41.94	32.72
Use of technology such as SMS/ WhatsApp to support classroom teaching	SMS: 40.93 WhatsApp: 22.12 Zoom: 18.14 Skype: 9.29 Radio: 11.28 TV: 9.29 Google classroom: 25.44 Other: 42.42	SMS: 35.48 WhatsApp: 83.06 Zoom: 54.84 Skype: 12.9 Radio: 0.81 TV: 8.06 Google classroom: 36.29 Other: 29.03	SMS: 22.18 WhatsApp: 87.57 Zoom: 42.51 Skype: 4.76 Radio: 1.69 TV: 4.84 Google classroom: 34.09 Other: 31.38
Previous knowledge of OER/Online learning (5-8/10)	54.86	60.48	53.12
OER/online learning included in previous studies (at least partly)	68	89	48.91
Expectation of improved knowledge of OER	75.66	90.32	83.01
Expectation of improved knowledge and ability in online learning	76.77	86.29	86.87
Important to gain a completion certificate	74.12	73.39	65.12
Expectation of improved teaching skills and job security	71.02	64.52	64.49
Expectation of stronger online skills for use in daily life	72.79	70.97	71.33

As will be observed from Table 2, participants in Iteration 1 (targeted primarily at teachers from Fiji and other Pacific island states), had limited access to the wired Internet and were more likely to make use of older technologies not so dependent on an Internet connection (e.g., SMS rather than WhatsApp, more use of radio and television content). Although participants had some prior knowledge of OER and/or online learning, improved knowledge in these areas was a high expectation for most participants, although fewer participants in Iterations 2 and 3 (targeted primarily at teachers in Trinidad and Tobago and other Caribbean island nations) anticipated improved teaching skills and job security as a result of taking the course.

Findings from Mid-course Survey (perceptions and perspectives on pedagogy)

A total of 2255 (19.5%) completed the mid-course survey which requested a response to a variety of statements related to perceptions and perspectives on open educational practices as well as education broadly. The purpose behind the administration of this survey early in the course and then linked to reflection at the end was to see if these perceptions and perspectives had shifted as a result of their experience in the course.

The findings were similar across all three iterations for most statements but we did note some variations in the responses.

Across all three iterations, participants had a strong belief in the notion of education as a human right and thought that technology could enhance the teaching and learning process. However, participants in Iteration 1 placed greater emphasis on mastery of subject matter than participants in Iterations 2 and 3 who were, perhaps, also valuing the process or learning or the achievement of cross-cutting learning competencies. There was a strong belief that resources developed using public funds should be available cost free and openly accessible, especially among participants in Iteration 1. Across all three iterations, participants felt that OER has potential to help teachers design more meaningful learning experiences, because of the possibilities for re-using, revising, remixing and sharing.

Participants recognised that teaching with technology takes time but were divided over whether it took more time than traditional teaching. Few participants felt that finding and adapting OER was a poor use of a teacher's time but they felt that it might be the case that sometimes the OER found might not be of the best quality. Participants claimed they often integrated technology in their teaching, especially those in Iteration 1. While participants in Iterations 2 and 3 were less likely to actively avoid use of OER, participants in Iteration 1 said they were more likely to use OER and to create their own. While the most common response to whether or not resources were used multiple times was 'sometimes', participants in Iteration 1 suggested they were slightly more likely to modify, combine or re-organise resources before using them, and were slightly more likely to share. Overall, having completed Unit 2 on finding and using OER, participants across all three iterations said they would "often" use OER in various ways but recognised that finding and integrating OER could sometimes be time-consuming. Most participants across all three iterations felt that use of OER only "rarely" or "sometimes" could lead to sharing wrong information.

Although a MOOC is designed with an open audience in mind, it seems that when large numbers of participants from the same region engage in almost real-time discussions, a new regional dynamic begins to emerge. There was very positive feedback on the sharing of examples, and we speculate that this is partly because the teachers involved had already begun the process of adapting OER from

elsewhere to suit a particular context, requiring even less adaption for the next teacher within a similar context engaging with that resource. We were also made conscious of the ways in which access to technology affected how participants engaged. Mid-course, we discovered a way to reduce the data-requirements of the short in-course videos, for example, and we felt that our decision to make all key resources downloadable for use off-line was also vindicated.

Findings from End-course Survey (reflection in relation to expectations and pedagogic shifts)

There were 2083 end-course responses representing 18% of the total population.

The satisfaction ratings were slightly higher for Iterations 1 and 2. The course was designed with the expectation that participants would spend about three hours on each unit (although a lot of additional optional readings were also provided). Respondents reported spending on average 3.98, 3.99, and 4.34 hours per week, respectively, but some in Iteration 3 felt they needed the full four weeks to complete the course properly, whereas the Ministry had organised them into two-week cohorts to reach all teachers before schools re-opened. This could partially account for the slightly lower rankings assigned by participants in Iteration 3.

Across all iterations of the course, participants indicated that access to computers by students and teachers, teachers' knowledge and skills and access to training opportunities, as well as Internet reliability and costs, will impact significantly on take-up of ICT but most indicated that the course had impacted positively on their practice and that they were keen to learn more.

Findings from Teacher Stories

Participants were also invited to post reflections on ways in which the OER4OL course had impacted their teaching during COVID-19. Using a Reflection Guide supplied by the course leaders, they also shared stories on their plans for future classroom practice and expectations for teacher professional development and recognition. The responses were similar and mostly positive across all three iterations. Teacher stories were shared by 95 (5.6%) participants from Iteration 1, 119 (10.7%) participants from Iteration 2, and 965 (11%) participants from Iteration 3.

Most participants expressed satisfaction with the course, with a number indicating that it was their first time to participate in a MOOC. There seemed to be general satisfaction with the technology used to deliver the course, with some participants experiencing challenges in accessing the course resources initially but finding overall that it was worth persevering:

The best decision that I took in 2020 was to take this course. It has been so fulfilling and enjoyable. I have started to use all the skills learnt in preparing my worksheets and using OER so wisely, ensuring that it is not copied but open for use. The research guides, quizzes and portfolios were best part of learning. In addition, knowing more from other students was so meaningful and motivating. There wasn't a time when I felt like giving up. This course inspired me to become better teacher (Participant Iteration 1).

This was my first class with MOOC and it was excellent. I have gained a lot of knowledge.
(Participant Iteration 2)

Several participants indicated that their knowledge and skills in OER had improved significantly, and they felt ready to teach online.

The course helped me to be more proficient in the use of OER and to be mindful of copyright laws when using online resources. It also reminded me of the importance of timely feedback during assessments online as well taught me that students should have a breakdown of how they should be engaged in an online lesson. (Participant Iteration 3)

This course ... made me more knowledgeable about developing rubrics/portfolios and gave me great insight as to how imperative rubrics are needed for distance/online learning. (Participant Iteration 3)

There was evidence of peer collaborative learning in the evolving teacher community as noted by several participants:

I felt overwhelmed but understood that if I took everything one step at a time, I will get through it all. I met colleagues along the way who were able to assist in some areas and the level of collaboration experienced this year has been greater than anything I have experienced in my more than 20 years' experience as a teacher. (Participant Iteration 2)

Yes, learning about OER has given me more opportunity to work with my students and assist my colleagues with the same. (Participant Iteration 3)

Most participants indicated that they had used the knowledge gained in their daily practice. Asked whether any of the skills and knowledge gained / resources accessed had been helpful during COVID-19, some pointed out that the course had helped them in understanding not only how to teach online but also the learning experiences that their learners would go through while studying online.

Yes, this course will improve my teaching performance because I have a better understanding of the challenges that new online learners face, and how to adapt my approach to implement and support this new way of learning in a virtual environment. (Participant Iteration 3)

One of the main highlights of this course is the notion that learning is not limited to the classroom, but anywhere can become a "learning space." Educators must use the appropriate tools to reach the learners in any learning space. (Participant Iteration 3)

For others, the course stimulated reflections on previous courses delivered online, as well as the motivation to seek relevant online resources for the learner, now and in future:

I am already seeing ways that we can reach students who may be absent due to illness or injury, ways we can facilitate their learning. (Participant Iteration 2)

Prior to this course, I did not recognize how much I was missing the mark with the methods I used to engage my learners. COVID-19 forced us all to suddenly switch to online teaching and learning. Now that I have gained this knowledge, I am confident that I'm able to meet the needs of all parties involved. (Participant Iteration 2)

Whereas the teachers felt that the course would improve their teaching performance, many were not as optimistic that it would improve their opportunity for promotion.

Yes, it will be an asset to promotion because the pandemic has pushed the world to use and become more dependent on the computer and other electronic technologies. (Participant Iteration 2)

No, I don't believe this course will give me an opportunity for a promotion, however it will further increase or improve my skills to enhance my teaching. (Participant Iteration 3)

However, several participants from Iteration 1 (Fiji+) felt that the course *would* improve their opportunity for promotion.

The ministry had encouraged teachers to register and participate in this course thus our professional development hours will be updated (Participant Iteration 1).

In a similar vein, the MOOC seemed to have given the participants a sense of global visibility and pride in their teaching career for some participants in Iteration 1. Besides, some felt better prepared for any future school closures that would come about due to unforeseen disasters.

I want the world to know that I am a teacher who can competently teach online (Participant Iteration 1).

Saying that the world is very small has come true. I have interacted and learnt something worthwhile with so many new and unfamiliar learners from different parts of the world (Participant Iteration 1).

Teachers' opinions on their professional development journey in a post-COVID-19 era were varied. The significance of teacher professional development was iterated in several posts, and so was the awareness about the need for on-going transition to technology-based learning. The need for teacher support towards safe teaching and learning environments was also a recurring theme.

While Covid-19 will be remembered for taking many, many lives, this period has revitalized my professional development and given me new life as an educator. (Participant Iteration 2)

The course... showed me the need of always being alert with the way things are changing and how to adapt to these changes and make the best of it. (Participant Iteration 2)

Before the emergence of the COVID 19 virus (and subsequently the pandemic) teaching consisted mostly of "chalk and talk". The situation that we now face has forced teachers and administrators to search for new ways to teach. This course has definitely filled an important gap in the transition that we must now all make. I plan to use the knowledge that I have gained for the benefit of my learners. (Participant Iteration 3)

The course has helped me develop not only as a professional, but as a lifelong learner in education. (Participant Iteration 3)

Findings from Review of Lesson Plans

More than 5,000 lesson plans were uploaded after peer review and discussion in a dedicated lesson forum, using a rubric as a guide. Several examples of uploaded lesson plans, reflecting learning across the course, were randomly selected for review.

Some lessons learned from this exercise were:

1. It is good to provide a fully worked out example on the one hand but it can potentially limit creativity on the other. From the 5,000 lesson plans available, Ministries could, however, build a set of examples for improvement and examples that could be used as models.
2. Many teachers need more support to think through carefully what tool to use, and how and when to use it, to ensure ongoing communication throughout the learning process.
3. Teachers generally need more support in how to structure activities for learners working independently and how to provide written guidelines.

Need for Improvement

Although “pinning” key discussion forums was helpful in focusing discussions, the inability to thread discussions made navigation difficult and participants also continued to generate their own discussion forums on the same topic. In future iterations we will use separate spaces for participant-initiated and teacher-initiated discussions.

In addition to survey responses, we received several unsolicited emails from participants in Iteration 3. A very few were critical of the course, for example:

While I understand about licenses, those YouTube videos with Creative Commons are limited, boring and not applicable to my grade level. ... My internet went down since last Friday and resumed late last night. How was extension of time going to be allotted to me if no restoration? (Respondent Iteration 3)

I was not totally satisfied with this course. There was too much work and reading to do in a short space of time. I actually thought we would be taught HOW to use a new online platform. (Respondent, Iteration 3)

The course outline indicated that the course would be at an introductory level and a set of separate resource links provided included resources linked to both primary programmes and several secondary subjects:

I write to inform you that I found your course very beneficial especially given the current situation with education, but the mentors failed me. As a participant of cohort 1, I was disappointed that I was NOT able to receive additional guidance from the mentors when I requested such via email. ... As a result, I had no choice but to submit my assignment without any guidance. This outcome was disappointing since it was stated via one of the videos posted on the site as well as under 'announcements' that mentors were there to lend assistance. (Respondent Iteration 3)

As previously noted, a MOOC by its very nature deals with large numbers. By and large, MOOCs are not designed for individualised feedback given the volume of learners, other than as automated in the form of a quiz, for example. If we were to use mentors again in future, it would be necessary to spend more time thinking about how best to use them. For example, each mentor could be assigned a specialist role, e.g., primary literacy, junior secondary maths and then create their own discussion forums about these.

The following email reflects several that were received in which participants in Iteration 3 felt they were unable to complete adequately within the two-week timeframe. However, all participants were granted extended access after the initial two-week period to complete all tasks assigned in the MOOC.

This course needs a longer time frame than 10 - 11 days to complete if participants are to gain knowledge and skills from it and feel comfortable and confident knowing that learning took place as well as they can use this to improve their jobs within the face of the current pandemic being experienced worldwide. (Participant Iteration 3)

However, the following email reflects an appreciation that the course focused on the core needs and formed a base for further reflection and professional development as intended (and is more in alignment with the feedback received through the surveys and the teacher stories):

I need to express my heartfelt thanks and deep appreciation to the Course Team for the “Caribbean Regional: Using Open Educational Resources for Online Learning.” This was a most intensive, very comprehensive program of study that explored the core matter as it relates to the teacher, the learner, the curriculum to be delivered, the pedagogical tools, the actualizing of learning using technology. I was really absorbed in my learning and because of the design structure of this course, I felt compelled to do more. This has been the most useful tool empowering me with the invaluable knowledge and skills that I so need. (Respondent, Iteration 3)

A significant number of participants in this OER4OL short course went on to engage with other short courses offered by COL or through COL’s partnership with Coursera.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As an “introduction”, the short course seemed largely to have served its purpose. The major challenge for most participants in Iteration 3 was the shorter timeframe adopted to try to support multiple cohorts before schools re-opened. One of the challenges when very large numbers of students are all posting examples and comments is that it becomes difficult to track the engagement and to respond appropriately. By using a cohort system to limit the number of very active participants to about 2,500 at a time, it was hoped that it would be more manageable to provide feedback and support.

There is clearly a need for such a course. In revising the course for future use, we will need to:

- Improve the Powerpoint resources and related videos;
- Integrate mentoring support more effectively; and
- Consider adding an introduction on use of a variety of online platforms (or at least indicate a link to another course covering this ground.)

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