

## **Learning without Institutions**

The high water mark of MOOC hype has been reached. The ebbing away of the initial surge reveals a barely impacted institutional dominance. Practices, personnel and purpose appear as before. Yet, amongst the flotsam and jetsam littering the departed MOOC flood-lands, some efforts at establishing new ways of networking learning exist. This presentation defines the creation, growth and experiences of an online learning platform that sought to challenge some of HE's most treasured beliefs. COOCs (Community Open Online Courses) is a platform that gives course creation privileges to everyone, choices of course content based on the individual/ community and the access to learning free of cost. Several hundred users and twenty-three research participants revealed that non-institutional space is a rich and contested space. The influence of institutional ideology is not so easily thrown off but desire to seek freedom and autonomy pervades many experiences. This presentation highlights some of the key themes that emerge when learning platforms develop beyond the academy. Themes include Gatekeepers and the tendency toward representation over participation, new voices, institutional gravity, questions of vulnerability and responsibility and nuanced approaches to what learning means. The basis of the research is a Participatory Action Research project, running over 18 months. That this was part of a PhD research thesis lends a further angle of the challenges of developing authentic community-facing, network-immersed research. This paper argues that the influence of the institution on the research, the gravitational pull of convention on the project, means finding truly authentic learning away from tradition is complex and contested. Despite these challenges, the project reveals a number of exciting ways in which participants rethought and reframed the who, the what and the where of learning. These are significant as we continue to seek ways to create future learning opportunities that require widening access to education in an environment of shrinking funding.

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