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Power and the Platform: A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Rhetoric and Politics in Composition Massive Open Online Courses

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Politics in Composition Massive Open Online Courses

by

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Abstract

In the changing landscape of complex networks for free, open education, MOOCs – or massive open online courses – have been touted by some scholars as a recent breakthrough that will transform pedagogical approaches in the future. As we celebrate this year the 20th anniversary of Cynthia and Richard Selfe's landmark article, "The Politics of the Interface," our attention should be directed to studying the maps of MOOC interfaces as educational, political, and ideological borderlands. By featuring the findings from a cyber-autoethnographic study that involves a critical-analytical examination on a myriad of composition MOOCs offered by Duke University, Ohio State University, and Georgia Institute of Technology, this thesis reveals current MOOC interfaces as a Western-centric, monocultural structures, and problematizes the kinds of borders established and maintained in MOOCs. By identifying the presence and effects of cultural and infrastructural dominance in MOOCs, this thesis examines ways in which students and teachers can establish new discursive domains within MOOC interfaces. Following a phenomenological methodology, which embodies self-consciousness as a central research experience, I reflect on my own attitudes and feelings about the process of observation and analysis to draw inferences of a writer-scholar's engagement with MOOC interfaces. Instead of simply blindly rejecting or embracing MOOCs as the "next big thing" in education, I delve deeply into their interfaces to show how they conceal their power structure as a way to open up conversations about power and its exercise in computer interface design.

Acknowledgments

To my mother, who has been my spiritual support and inspiration.

To my father, who brought home our first computer on a fine day in 2005.

The words. Why did they have to exist? Without them, there wouldn't be any of this.

– The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

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INTRODUCTION

Motivation

It was by no accident that the idea for this thesis project was conceived. Having

been an avid user of computers and new technologies, I often seek out the latest programs

and resources that would enhance my productivity and proficiency. In fall of 2011, I was

introduced to free online resources by my friend Ivan, a software engineer from Ukraine.

Then international students at St. Cloud State University, we often exchange courses we

found interesting on Open Yale Courses (http://oyc.yale.edu) and talked about our

assignments when we met on weekends. We would share with each other interesting facts

we learned from our lecture videos and projects that we were working on. In fall of 2012,

we both discovered an even-better web source that offers complete college-level courses

for free – Coursera (http://coursera.org). We also learned about massive open online

courses, or MOOCs, and their pedagogical foundations. On Coursera, we found hundreds

of courses offered by big-name universities such as the Massachusetts Institution of

Technology (MIT), Stanford University, Georgia Tech, and Yale University. After

browsing through hundreds of course titles and syllabi, I signed up for my first MOOC in

spring of 2013 – "E-Learning and Digital Cultures" – offered through The University of Edinburgh.

Shortly after my first two weeks MOOC-ing on Coursera, I experienced some drawbacks:

- it was rather difficult to navigate the course page on the learning management system (LMS) Coursera offers; the site design was not intuitive and the pages were text heavy

- the course was indeed massive; hundreds of comments flooded the course forum within the first day of its opening and I found myself lost in the midst of all user comments

- a social media page was set up outside Coursera to allow students to interact independently; but one can only do so if he or she was fluent in using Facebook or someone who constantly keeps track of the updates

- there were vocabularies and terms uncommon to me, even as a graduate student of English and Mass Communication; some course-specific jargons were not clarified

Given these limitations, I still find values in taking a self-paced online course such as this to learn additional knowledge outside of my regular coursework. However, as my MOOC progressed and my observations continued, Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe's enjoinder from "The Politics of the Interface" echoed regularly at the back of my mind: Instructors of English and composition teachers need to be more than just users of technology; they need to "think carefully about the implications of its use within their own classrooms" (78). As a scholar-teacher, I am encouraged by the Selfes to "recognize computer

interfaces as noninnocent physical borders" (77), but rather with political and ideological impacts on cultural and linguistic understanding of MOOCs. Celebrating its 20th anniversary of publication at the 2014 Computers and Writing annual conference, Selfe and Selfe's work continues to remind us that whatever digital revolutions we embark upon, we should always remain aware of the borders "constructed along ideological axes that represent dominant tendencies in our culture," borders that "can serve to prevent the circulation of individuals for political purposes" (65).

Furthermore, Joel Haefner's "The Politics of the Code" provides an initial focus on exploring the software behind the interface of the programs we use in composition classrooms. Haefner quotes Theodor Nelson's claim that "a computer language is a system for casting spell[s]," and that "English instructors in computer-supported classrooms need to know something about the context and the necromancers of the code" (338). Because I have concerns about the users of technology, particular in MOOCs, I became intrigued by how interface design serves as cultural and linguistic borders for students. In this thesis, I will explore the very concept of MOOCs, the early theoretical frameworks that leads to open online courses, and consider the strategies that students and teachers might employ to maximize the potential of MOOCs in the composition classroom.

<u>Of Hype and Hope: A MOOC Phenomenon</u>

Excitement around MOOCs has grown stronger and louder since their inception at Stanford University, when Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig, and their instructional team, designed a tuition-free artificial intelligence course, taught over the web to hundreds of thousands of students in 2011 (Leckart, "The Stanford Education

Experiment"). More recent hype began in the fall of 2011, when over 450,000 students

signed up for a computer science course offered at the elite university. Within months of

the Stanford experiments, a few start-up companies debuted in the name of giving

"everyone access to the world-class education that has so far been available to a select

few" ("About Coursera"). Coursera, a for-profit educational technology enterprise

founded by Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller from Stanford University, is among the

several "social entrepreneurship" companies that partner with "top universities in the

world" to offer free online courses. Other massive open course providers include Udacity,

edX, Khan Academy, Peer-to-Peer University (P2PU), Udemy, and NovoEd, just to name

a few.

     Since 2011, MOOCs have been touted by many as the breakthrough that will

transform education in the future. Many people inside and outside the academia are

gushing that MOOCs are the best thing to happen to education since movable type. As an

online space for writing specialists to discuss and debate over hot-topic issues, the

Writing Program Administrators (WPA) listserv observed in 2012 and 2013 the

discussions centered on MOOCs flooding the inboxes of subscribers as a growing

number of teachers in the field of composition studies began to articulate diverse views

on the model of pedagogy MOOCs may present. On a more celebratory tone, *The New

York Times* named 2012 "The Year of MOOC." *Education Life* columnist Laura Pappano

writes,

> This is the year everyone wants in. Elite universities are partnering with Coursera
> at a furious pace. It now offers courses from 33 of the biggest names in
> postsecondary education, including Princeton, Brown, Columbia and Duke. In
> September [2012], Google unleashed a MOOC-building online tool, and Stanford
> unveiled Class2Go with two courses. (Pappano, "The Year of MOOC")

Puzzling through the potential of MOOCs in the realm of education, many individuals and corporations have become MOOC evangelists who believed this new instructional model are the future of teaching and learning. Soon, words about MOOCs were heard by everyday students and traditional learners, and MOOC providers observed tremendous growth – from student enrollment to range of courses rolled out on these platforms. Shortly after four months since its establishment, on August 9, 2012, Coursera announced it hit 1 million enrolled students across 196 countries (Coursera Blog, "Coursera hits 1 million students"). Comparatively speaking, such growth puts Coursera among the fastest start-ups to reach their first one-millionth user – it took today's social media giant, Facebook, 10 months to reach the same milestone (Shontell, "Here's How Long It Took"). With this rate of progression, one might simply conclude that MOOCs are here to stay.

Everett Rogers, in his popularized diffusion of innovations theory, explains that every innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system. Relying heavily on human capital, the process of adoption is usually presented in an adoption curve that resembles a bell-shaped arc. Once a new technology has critical a critical mass adoption, it will eventually be able to self-sustain – to remain adopted by its users. According to Rogers, the categories of adopters are: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (150), as shown below.
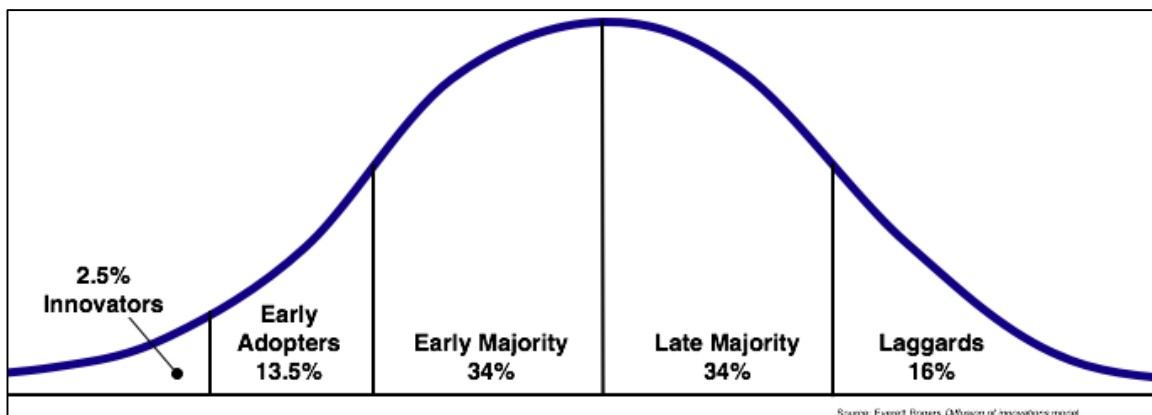
Figure 1

Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations

Further, MOOCs have also been flaunted as a potential disruptive innovation – one that displaces its predecessors and helps to create a new model in education. In contrast to a sustaining innovation, a disruptive innovation "creates new markets or value network" that do not evolve from its previous technology but rather change the entire market (Christensen, "Disruptive Innovation"). Clayton Christensen defines a disruptive innovation as a product or service designed for a new set of customers. It is

> a process by which a product or service takes root initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market and then relentlessly moves up market, eventually displacing established competitors. (Christensen, "Disruptive Innovation")

As a disruptive innovation, MOOCs allow for a new population of students at the bottom of the market access to education that was historically only accessible to students from the privileged class.

To track to progress of MOOCs as a disruptive innovation, many refer to the Gartner Hype Cycle for enlightenment. During a presentation at SXSWedu in early 2013, Instructure CEO Josh Coates suggested that MOOCs are in the midst of the hype cycle

with expectations undergoing wild swings ("SXSWedu 2013 - MOOCs: Hype or Hope?"). Jonathan Tapson of *PandoDaily*, a news blog for technology startup, believes too that MOOCs have passed the "Peak of Inflated Expectations" and is headed toward the "Trough of Disillusionment" (Tapson, "MOOCs and the Gartner Hype Cycle"). The following diagrams show the phases in the hype circle and Tapson's projection of how the MOOC hype cycle would unfold.
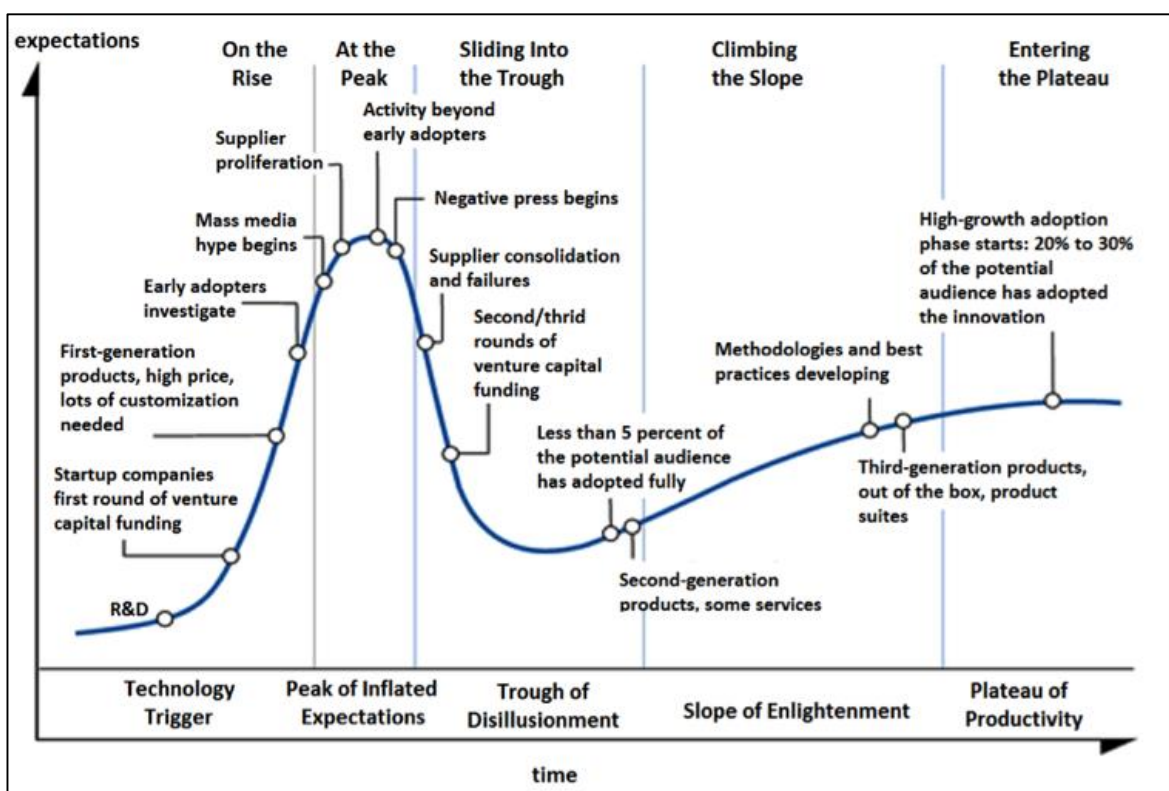
Figure 2

Gartner Hype Cycle
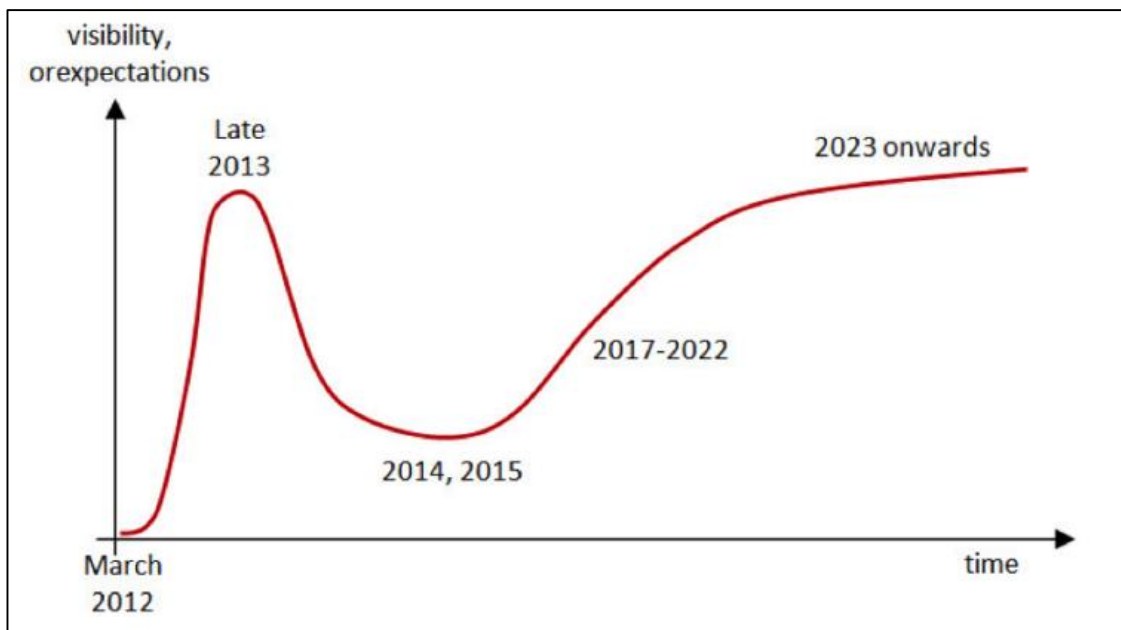
Figure 3

A Projection of the Hype Cycle for MOOCs

As described by Tapson, MOOCs are "a very slow tsunami":

> [MOOCs are] a gradual but inexorably rolling change in societal and professional
> attitudes, pinned at one end by the bedrock certainty that the elite institutions
> produce the elite people, and pulled at the other end by the growing awareness
> that free isn't necessarily junk, and it's, well, free. (Tapson, "MOOCs and the
> Gartner Hype Cycle")

MOOCs enthusiasts like Tapson are confident that traditional institutions will not

diminish in the near future, but rather become terminally ill by the disruption of MOOCs.

In the case of education, they encourage academics to develop strategies for co-existing

with MOOCs.

Resistance to MOOCs

Whereas MOOCs are highly celebrated by early adopters, there were avid critics

who began to question the one-to-many model of education MOOCs present, objecting

that online instruction may not be as effective as face-to-face instruction. While some hope that MOOCs will topple the ivory towers of higher education and enlighten the masses, others warn of the pitfalls in their design and implementation. Moshe Vardi, editor-in-chief of *Communications of the ACM*, says some "describe the current environment as 'MOOC panic' or 'MOOC mania'" (5). He detests the "absence of serious pedagogy in MOOCs" as most lectures are delivered via videos, which are shown over and over again. While providers like Coursera claim that their platform design is based upon sound pedagogical foundations, Vardi writes, "Early rhetoric about the educational value of MOOCs was quite lofty, talking about the goal of reaching the quality of individual tutoring, but it is difficult to reconcile such rhetoric with massiveness as an essential feature of MOOCs" (5). His comments reflect the importance for assessment on the pedagogy of MOOCs since early MOOCs were offered as a form of informal learning open to anyone for free without a for-credit component. With the changing features and purposes of MOOCs today, it is crucial to evaluate the pedagogical directions MOOCs entail.

As the MOOC model of learning still relies largely on lectures and the designated online space for interactions, it certainly presents challenges in terms of the quality of the learning experience: Can learning be scaled up this much? What about a course taken by 400,000 students, taught by a team of five professors? Furthermore, should universities offer credit for students upon their completion of MOOCs? And among the higher-order, pedagogical concerns – do MOOCs replicate the undesirable banking model in learning? Critiqued so decisively by Paulo Freire, the banking model of education emphasizes teacher-centric learning where students are passive absorbers of information and that the

purpose of learning is memorization of facts (12). Unfortunately this model does not stress understanding of the taught material; students can simply memorize facts without truly comprehending what they are learning. In making sense of MOOC pedagogical model, there is a need to point out the consequences such a model will have inside and outside the educational structure.

Other debates on the effectiveness of this new model for teaching and learning stem from contexts of student assessment, peer review and peer grading, instructor-student interaction, student engagement with course materials, enrollment and retention rates, etc. Given this list of worries, the ensuing corporatization of MOOCs further evokes uproar among teachers who fear their positions may be replaced by online talking heads through an almost-certain inevitability of corporate "McMOOCs." As the future unfolds, teachers and students alike are anxious to know if MOOCs are indeed capable of representing online platforms as a positive learning environment.

Entering the Politics of the Platform

Taking these concerns into consideration, I analyze the pedagogy of MOOCs within a critical and rhetorical theoretical framework. In the midst of heated discussions on MOOCs and the impacts they have on teaching and learning, the goal of this thesis is to sketch the outlines for an alternative vision for instructors of English and composition, one that urges them to be more critical and reflective in considering the integration of MOOCs in their curriculum. Through an examination of the historical development of Open Educational Resources (OER), which leads to the rise of MOOCs, I investigate how connectivism informs the new pedagogical approach in MOOCs. As a way into this study, I turn to Selfe and Selfe's canonical work, "The Politics of the Interface," and

Michel Foucault's power analytics to better understand some of the political and

ideological boundaries associated with computer interfaces that MOOC users are forced

to interact with. By featuring the findings from a cyber-autoethnographic study that

involves a critical-analytical examination on a myriad of composition MOOCs offered by

Duke University, Ohio State University, and Georgia Institute of Technology, this thesis

unpacks current MOOC interfaces as discursive domains in which teachers and students

navigate and socialize with others. In turn, I aim to problematize the kinds of borders

established and maintained in MOOCs and to urge instructional designers to reconceive

and remap MOOCs as educational, political, and ideological spaces. Along that goal, I

hope to help users and teachers identify the presence and effects of cultural and

systematic domination associated with MOOCs so they can establish a new discursive

territory within the systems.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Open Educational Resources Movement

Originating in 2008 alongside the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement, MOOCs are the latest evolution of freely accessible, open licensed documents and media that are useful for teaching, learning, educational, research, and assessment purposes. Often cited is the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which defines OER as "teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others" (Hewlett Foundation, "Open Educational Resources"). The OER movement is developed in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) effort and resides in the wider context of a culture of open knowledge, open source, free sharing and peer collaboration (Wiley, "A Brief History of OER"). The MIT OpenCourseWare project (http://ocw.mit.edu) was among the first to be credited for sparkling a global OER movement by putting all MIT course catalogs online in 2002 (Guttenplan, "For Exposure"). Within the same year, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted OER in the Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries and since then has taken leadership role in making countries

around the world aware of the potential benefits of OER. Yale University, too, has set

the precedent for open source educational resources. Through a grant from William and

Flora Hewlett Foundation, Open Yale Courses was supported to realize the mission of the

OER initiative – to "use information technology to help equalize access to knowledge

and educational opportunities across the world" (Open Yale Courses, "About").

Since OER are intended to be available for a variety of educational purposes, they

rely on licensing options different from those made for traditional intellectual property

rights. As a result of this demand, alternative and more flexible licensing means became

available via Creative Commons, an organization that provides ready-made licensing

agreements that are less restrictive than the "all rights reserved" terms of standard

international copyright. It is common to find these licensing labels on most course

materials on MOOCs today. Types of open educational resources include: full courses,

course materials, modules, learning objects, open textbooks, openly licensed (often

streamed) videos, tests, software, and other tools, materials, or techniques used to support

access to knowledge. OER may be freely and openly available static resources, dynamic

resources which change over time in the course of having knowledge seekers interacting

with and updating them (such as a Wikipedia article), or a course or module with a

combination of these resources.

Parallel to the intentions of OER, the OpenCourseWare Consortium was founded

in 2005 to "extend the reach and impact of open course materials and foster new open

course materials" (Attwood, "Get it out in the open"). International initiatives such as

OER Africa, Wikiwijs (in the Netherlands), Learning Resource Exchange for schools (in

Europe), Wikimedia Foundation, OER Commons, Curriki (a repository of free curricula

for K-12 education), and *Writing Commons* (by University of South Florida) were established to support, promote, and share open resources for educators, administrators, parents, and students. Ushered by such education paradigm shift is the development of MOOCs, situating itself in the wider context of open education, online learning and the changes that are currently taking place in higher education at a time of globalization of education.

MOOCs as New Distance Learning:
      Historical Development and Motivation

     The paint was barely dry with online OpenCourseWare when MOOCs were rolled out with enthusiasm. In 2008, Dave Cormier of the University of Prince Edward Island and Senior Research Fellow Bryan Alexander of the National Institute for Technology coined the term MOOC in response to a course designed and led by George Siemens of Athabasca University and Stephen Downes of the National Research Council. The course, "Connectivism and Connective Knowledge," also known as CCK08, was taught to 25 tuition-paying students at the University of Manitoba and 2200 students from the Internet who took the class free of charge (Parr, "MOOC creators criticize"). This scale of participation made an impact on Siemens and Downes' approach to online teaching, and they knew they needed new approaches to cater to the growing, global audience. In an open webinar panel presentation delivered to *Future of Education* (http://futureofeducation.com) through Blackboard Collaborate, "True History of the MOOC," participated by Cormier, Downes, and other MOOC enthusiasts, Cormier admits that MOOCs are born of the Internet and they allow organized learning to be facilitated asynchronously and distributed over a designated duration of time. As I will

further elaborate in the following sections, one of the key elements in MOOCs is distributed learning. Since CCK08 was the first to incorporate open learning with distributed content, it became the first, truly "organic" MOOC – one that "emphasizes creation, creativity, autonomy, and social networked learning" (Siemens, "MOOCs are Really a Platform"). Before I proceed with explorations on recent developments since Siemens and Downes' MOOC, it is only appropriate to give nods to the precursors of MOOCs, which trace back to as early as the 19th century.

Before the Digital Age, distance learning manifested in the form of correspondence courses. By 1890s, correspondence (or postal) courses on specialized topics, such as civil service tests and shorthand, were promoted by door-to-door salesmen. Over 4 million Americans were enrolled in correspondence courses by the 1920s, covering hundreds of practical job-oriented topics. Their completion rate was under 3% (Clark 328). In a lecture at Oxford in 1928, the eminent American educator Abraham Flexner delivered a withering indictment of correspondence study, claiming that it promoted "participation" at the expense of educational rigor.

> As universities rushed to expand their home-study programs in the 1920s, investigations revealed that the quality of the instruction fell short of the levels promised and that only a tiny fraction of enrollees actually completed the courses. … By the 1930s, once-eager faculty and administrators had lost interest in teaching by mail. The craze fizzled. (Carr, "The Crisis in Higher Education")

In the 1920s, broadcast radio became the new popular medium and most programs were free to their audiences. By 1922, station WJC, a New York University (NYU) operated station, began to broadcast its courses over the radio. Other schools followed, including Columbia, Harvard, Kansas State, Ohio State, Purdue, Wisconsin, Utah and many others. Students read textbooks and listened to broadcast lectures, while

mailing in answers to tests. Susan Matt and Luke Fernandez of Weber State University write on *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "we are not the first to believe that technology can transcend distance and erode ignorance." They report that between 1921-1928, the number of radios in the United States increased from six or seven thousand to 10 million. The hype and hope for on-air, open courses were similar to what many feel about MOOCs today, as Bruce Bliven, a journalist for *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, asked,

> Is radio to become a chief arm of education? Will the classroom be abolished and the child of the future be stuffed with facts as he sits at home or even as he walks about the streets with his portable receiving-set in his pocket? (148)

Answering his own question, Bliven wrote, "A good mind … must be built, not stuffed. … Radio, of course, faces squarely against this whole tide" (Matt and Fernandez, "Before MOOCs"). Yet, problems gradually emerged and doubts grew bigger on the potential of radio courses to replace traditional colleges. First with attrition, then there were reports that listeners' interest in erudition often competed with the temptations of entertainment. By the 1940s, radio courses had virtually vanished in the U.S. It was then the rise of televised course.

During World War II, motion pictures were employed to train millions of draftees, as lectures could demonstrate how to use physical equipment in action via broadcast screens (Cox and Morrison 115-117). In the 1950s, universities began offering televised courses by linking classrooms to remote campuses by providing closed-circuit video access for students. From 1957 through 1982, NYU collaborated with CBS to broadcast the *Sunrise Semester* series. The program was so named because it was aired at 6:00 a.m. and 6:30 a.m., depending on the area. Some chosen teachers from the NYU

faculty taught telecourses and offered credit to those who paid tuition fees, including

Neil Postman, then professor of English, speech, and educational theatre, who taught a

course called "Communication, the Invisible Environment" in 1976 (Lakeland Ledger,

"'Sunrise Semester' Begins"). Eventually, the program ran for almost 25 years and was

cancelled in early 1980s due to declining ratings.

As computers became more pervasive in educational institutions around 1970s,

universities began exploring options to bring computers into the curriculum. In 1959,

scholars and administrators at the University of Illinois convened a meeting about the

topic of computer instruction. Donald Bitzer, a laboratory assistant, was designated to

build a demonstration system (Van Meer, "PLATO"). In 1960, PLATO (Programmed

Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations) was born and ran on the University of Illinois

ILLIAC I computer. It was the first generalized computer-assisted instruction system

offering coursework – elementary to university – to University of Illinois-Urbana

Champagne students, local schools, and other universities. Later, the Control Data

Corporation (CDC) took over PLATO and planned to make PLATO a worldwide

computer product, which did not turn out as hoped. The last production of PLATO was

shut down in 2006.

Came the 1990s, Internet gained popularity and emails were becoming an

essential element of the workplace. James O'Donnell of the University of Pennsylvania

claims he taught the first MOOC-like open course using emails and the primitive Internet

technology in 1994:

> We depended on Gopher, the early Internet protocol, to deliver the syllabus and
> texts, and an old Listserv e-mail list for discussion. "Marketing" consisted of
> posting notices on various e-mail lists of interest, notably the venerable Humanist
> list that still flourishes. It worked, and went viral—500 people signed up. The

dozen advanced students paying tuition had a seminar on Monday afternoons to discuss the week's work, and they were assigned in rotation to write up the day's discussions and post them on the e-mail list overnight. Then the discussion caught fire: Hundreds listened, a few dozen participated, a couple of dozen participated very actively… (O'Donnell, "The Future is Now")

Twenty years later, in his reflection on *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, O'Donnell thinks academics "haven't solved the puzzle" even though they work with more advanced technological tools used in MOOCs today compared to the limited bandwidth and network connections back then.

Nonetheless, at the turn of the century, a pioneer of systematic aggregation of online interactive learning resources made available worldwide with a "freemium" model. ALISON (Advance Learning Interactive Systems Online) was launched in 2007 by Ashoka fellow, Mike Feerick in Galway, Ireland (Glader, "Khan Academy Competitor"). Many cite ALISON as the origin of the MOOC model, which focuses on workplace skills (Booker, "Early MOOC Takes a Different Path"). Credit for its work, ALISON won the UNESCO and World Innovation Summit for Education awards in 2010 and 2013 respectively.

With these precursors to MOOCs, the motivation for open courseware is obvious: To invite the world into the classroom. From correspondence courses to radio broadcast to telecourses to systematic online learning resources, teachers like O'Donnell strive to create a community for learning that allows students to be the learners they want to be. However, the same challenges seem to have persisted over the decades:

When the students are far flung, when their costs of failure are low and their rewards hard to describe and even harder to turn to financial benefit, when personal contact is minimal, then the challenge of transmitting the intensity that underlies every successful academic exercise gets a lot harder for the teacher. (O'Donnell, "The Future is Now")

Recognizing the importance of personal contact in learning, among other factors

mentioned by O'Donnell, Shanna Smith Jaggars, the assistant director of Columbia

University's Community College Research Center, writes, "The most important thing that

helps students succeed in an online course is interpersonal interaction and support"

(Fowler, "An Early Report Card"). Attending to this need, MOOCs are built on a learning

theory that places networks and connections in the core of learning: connectivism.

Connectivism and Connective Knowledge:
    The Rise of MOOCs

Many ideas behind MOOCs predate the social media revolution. Insofar as

students in the 21st century are mostly apt with basic computer proficiency – some being

more fluent in new media than others – MOOC developers leapt at the opportunity to knit

together education, entertainment, and social networking. The MOOC model of learning

strives to utilize the learner's available connections to stimulate a connected learning

ecology. Before I proceed with Siemens and Downes' depiction of connectivism and

connected knowledge, I would like to show an example of network diagram illustrated by
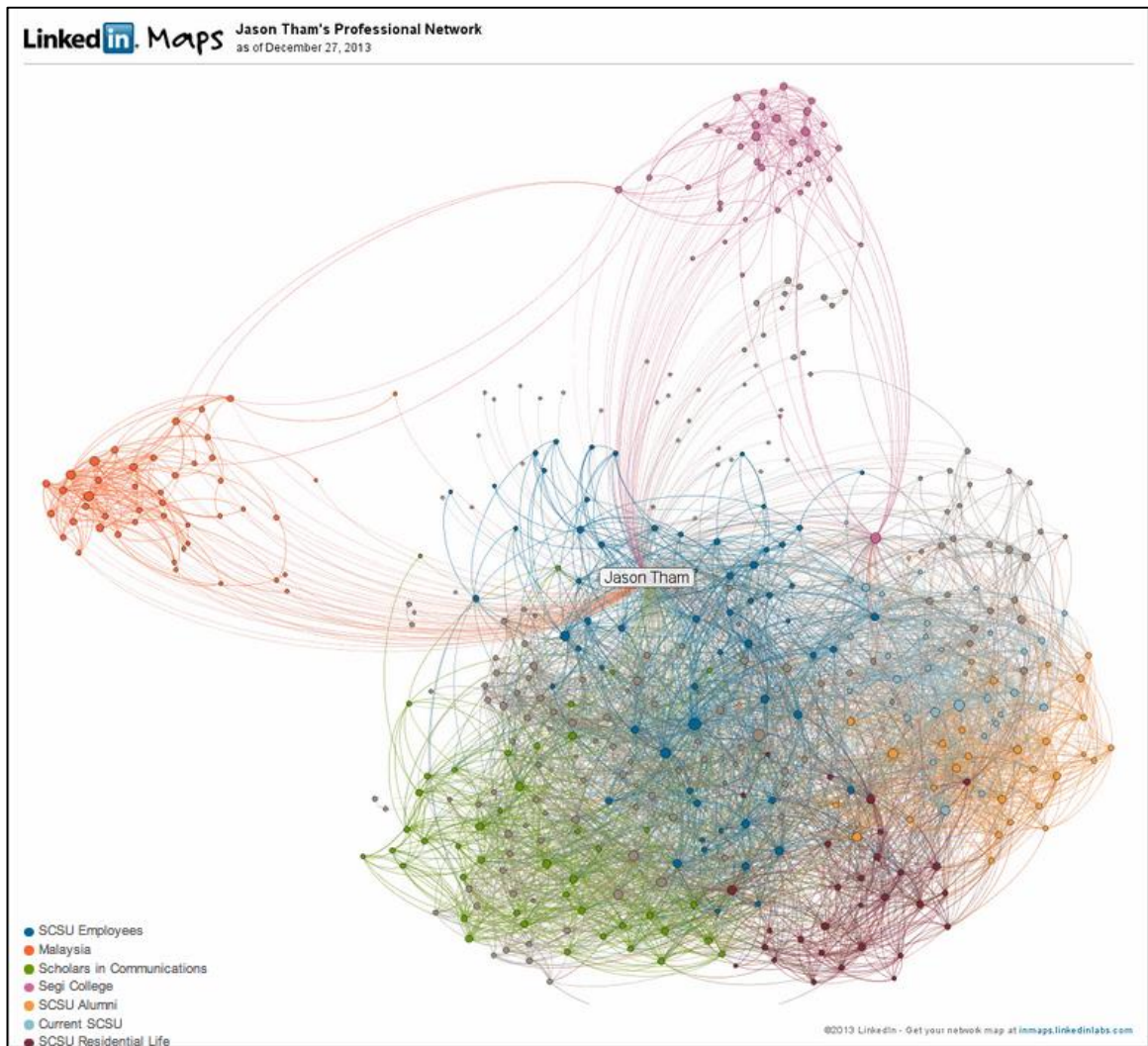
InMaps of LinkedIn.

Figure 4

My Professional Network

Available via http://inmaps.linkedinlabs.com, the map visualizes my professional

connections to various entities as of December 27, 2013. It shows the relationships and

connections I have with others, as well as among these personnel. Though it does not

display the strength of my connections (i.e. how much interaction I have had with my

contacts), it serves as a visual illustration of the aspects of connected learning theory I wish to discuss.

Defined as a "thesis that knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and therefore that learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse those networks" (Downes 85), connectivism was a new educational framework developed at the dawn of the 21st Century, explaining how people learn in a networked and digital world. George Siemens and Stephen Downes explored connectivism as a new learning theory and received increasing attention in the blogosphere in 2005, when they discussed their ideas concerning distributed knowledge (Wade, "A Critique of Connectivism). Epistemologically speaking, change is a constructive and necessary feature of the dynamics between research, theory, modeling, and practice within the evolving field of education, especially in a digital age where the act of learning is continually redefined by the available means of communication. Purported as a learning theory, connectivism is viewed as "a continual, network-forming process" (Siemens 25). In connectivism, learning and knowledge acquisition are defined as:

> Processes that occur within nebulous environments of shifting core elements – not entirely under the control of the individual. Learning (defined as knowledge patterns on which we can act) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database), and is focused on connecting specialized information sets. The connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state of knowing. (Siemens 30)

Networked for a global environment, MOOCs capitalize on the opportunity of the existing wealth of interconnectivity and social networking among its students to encourage peer-to-peer learning, feedback, and even grading.

According to Downes, connectivism is essentially the thesis that knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and therefore that learning consists of the

ability to construct and traverse those networks. Students participating in MOOCs are

often required to play an active role in contributing to discussions through the course

forums or third-party social networks, such as Facebook groups, Twitter, or Google+ and

Google Hangout. As such, MOOC students draw knowledge, sometimes, expert

information, from their peers in the same MOOC, fulfilling what Siemens and Downes

have envisioned a "network-forming process." Moreover, Siemens claims that knowledge

structures are neither hierarchical nor flat (Wade, "A Critique of Connectivism"), and

learning networks enable students to experience fluidity in nodes or information sources,

making the task of seeking knowledge more salient. The diagram below shows the

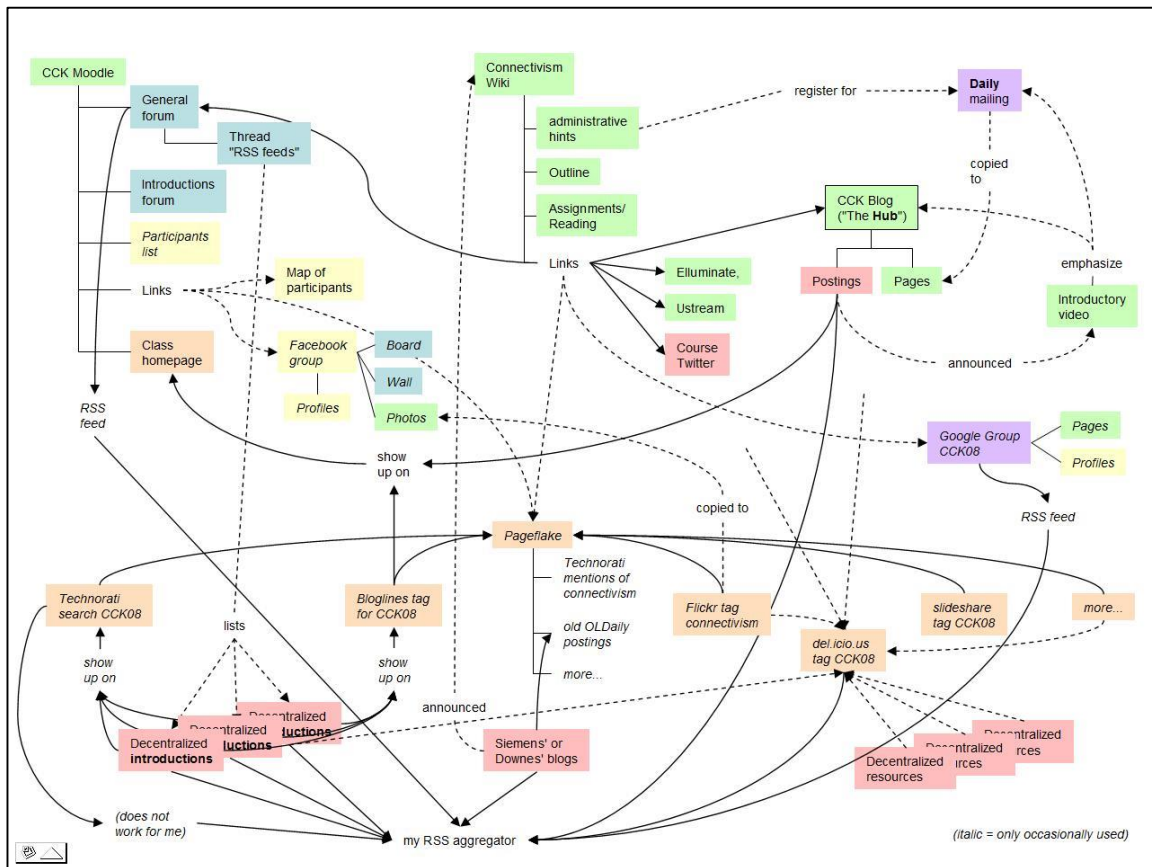structure of Siemens and Downes' CCK08.

Figure 5

CCK08 Distributed Learning Networks

As noted in the previous section, distributed learning is a key element in MOOCs. In CCK08, participants were encouraged to develop their own online presence in order to add to this distributed resource network. The course authors then used a content aggregation tool in order to bring all the content in one place. These aggregation tools included blogs for content creation, RSS (rich site summary/really simple syndication) readers for content aggregation, and online newsletters for content subscription.

In understanding knowledge and connected learning, and how networks learn, Downes describes knowledge as the set of connections between entities – between human and their artifacts. Further, the content of knowledge can "only be found through recognition of patterns emergent in the network of connections and interactions (Downes 9). Learning, hence, "is the creation and removal of connections between entities, or the adjustment of strengths of those connections" (Downes 9). More importantly, connected learning breaks the traditional notion of education as "making meaning"; Downes posits that knowledge is not merely a collection of facts or statements, nor is it the content of words and sentences – what we know or learn is "distributed across a network."

> In [the connectivism] model, articulation and measurement are essential skills. But our understanding of what it means to know, to infer, and to give reasons evolves in an environment where knowing consists of pattern recognition. The effectiveness of knowing is defined not by conformity but by adaptation. The idea of truth devolves into an account of perspectives and points of view. The having of a reason for action is not a matter of argumentation or deduction, but rather of comfort, familiarity and an inner sense of balance, the sort of instant awareness we would characterize of an expert. (Downes 10)

These principles are especially important when considering the questions of course content and assessment. In the MOOC model of learning, Downes speculates that learning is not a matter of transferring knowledge from a teacher to a learner, rather, it is the product of a learner' repeated creative acts, practices, and reflections on the practice. To this end, MOOCs present a renewed learning theory that differs from their predecessors – correspondence courses, on-air courses, and telecourses.

MOOCs as a New Pedagogical Approach

Among the reasons many teachers and scholars expressed anxiety and discomfort with MOOCs as a new teaching tool are the potential of MOOCs replacing teachers in the

classroom and the questionable soundness of pedagogy that MOOCs present (Libassi,

"How (and How Not to) Hate MOOCs"). Before one criticizes the educational values of

MOOCs, he or she should first understand them. MOOCs are built on the characteristics

of massiveness, openness, and – as mentioned in the preceding section – a connectivist

philosophy.

Massiveness. MOOCs easily accommodate hundreds of thousands of students. As

noted in the introduction chapter, Coursera has reached more than one million users in

August 2012 and the number of new users is still on the climb. "From a pragmatic

perspective, MOOCs provide access to large numbers of people who might otherwise be

excluded for reasons ranging from time, to geographic location, to formal prerequisites,

to financial hardship" (McAuley et al. 6).

Openness. Openness involves several key concepts: software, registration,

curriculum, and assessment; communication including interaction, collaboration, and

sharing; and learning environments. Osvaldo Rodriguez of Universidad del CEMA,

Argentina, further discusses that

> The software used is open-source, registration is open to anyone, and the
> curriculum is open (perhaps loosely structured and it can even change as the
> course evolves), the sources of information are open, the assessment processes (if
> they exist) are open, and the learners are open to a range of different learning
> environments. (Rodriquez 4)

McAuley et al. reiterated the concept of openness as any learner can take a MOOC and,

as are result, exclusion from higher education opportunities is not an issue.

Online. The key distinction between MOOCs and their precursors is that MOOCs

are conducted online and therefore do not share some of the common challenges

correspondence and broadcast courses face: time and space separation. As such, MOOCs capitalize on the ability to reach their students synchronously and asynchronously via online platforms, where students can pace their own learning.

Puzzled by the nature of MOOCs, Mathieu Plourde, an instructional designer at University of Delaware, created the following poster for the 2013 Saylor Foundation Digital Education Conference to argue: "every letter [in the MOOC acronym] is negotiable."
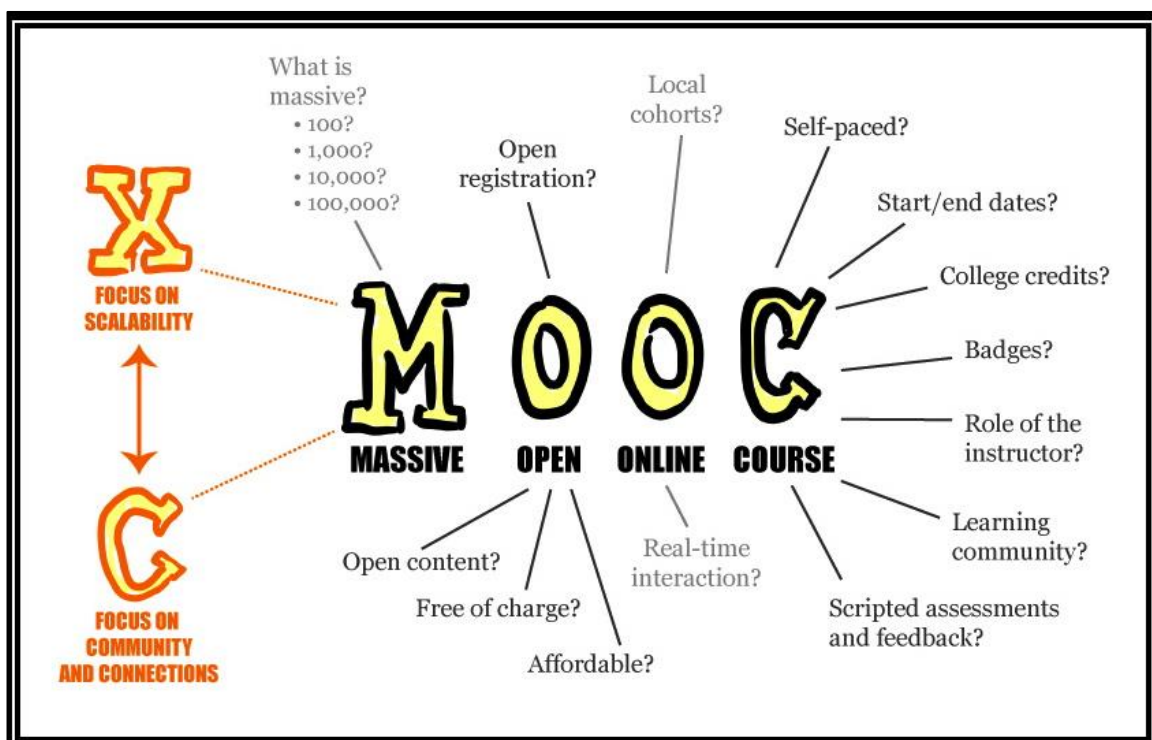

Figure 6

MOOC Poster

As previewed in the poster, there are two general types of MOOCs – xMOOC and cMOOC. In "Making Sense of MOOCs: Musings in a Maze of Myth, Paradox and

Possibility," John Daniel, a former Fellow at the Korea National Open University,

highlights the distinctions between the two types of course.

Daniel notes that the platforms for the two types of MOOC are substantially

different because they serve different purposes. He quotes Siemens, who says, "cMOOC

model emphasizes creation, creativity, autonomy and social networking learning," while

the xMOOC model "emphasizes a more traditional learning approach through video

presentations and short quizzes and testing" (Siemens, "MOOC is Really a Platform").

Put another way, "cMOOCs focus on knowledge creation and generation whereas

xMOOCs focus on knowledge duplication" (Siemens).

Unlike xMOOCs, whereby each student's trajectory through the course is linear

and based on the absorption and understanding of fixed competencies, cMOOCs are not

proscriptive, and participants set their own learning goals and types of engagement,

according to Martin Lugton, senior digital officer at Mind Charity. Lugton thinks

cMOOCs are "discursive communities creating knowledge together" (Lugton, "What is a

MOOC"). They are inherently personal and subjective, as participants create their

meaning and build and navigate their own web of connections. Among some past and in-

progress cMOOCs I have come across are:

- Change MOOC (http://change.mooc.ca): Co-facilitated by Dave Cormier,

  George Siemens, and Stephen Downes, this course introduces participants to

  the major contributions being made to the field of instructional technology by

  researchers today.

- MOOCMOOC (http://moocmooc.com): Hosted by *Hybrid Pedagogy*, this course is "a MOOC about MOOC" that examines the MOOC phenomenon, with an eye toward adapting its pedagogies for other learning environments.

- Cultivating Change Community MOOC (http://cultivatingchange.wp.d.umn.edu): Ran by the University of Minnesota, this is an eBook project designed to stimulate discussion about what's possible as well as generate new vision and academic technology direction.

- Openness in Education MOOC (http://open.mooc.ca): Facilitated by Rory McGreal and George Siemens, this is a credited course in Athabasca University's (AU) Master of Education in Distance Education. The 12-week course explores openness in education – its roots, its growing influence, and economic and systemic impact.

In an attempt to help Internet users keep track of the ongoing cMOOCs, *Connectivist MOOCs* (http://connectivistmoocs.org) was set up to curate these courses.

On the other hand, providers like Coursera and Udacity assume the xMOOC model, which "requires fewer sub-systems but must, of course, be designed to handle very high volumes and inputs from all over the world" (Daniel 10). Given that Google has "jumped into this space" by announcing in September 2012 its collaboration with edX to offer an open source course-building platform with Course Builder (http://code.google.com/p/course-builder), Daniel foresees many universities will opt for this cloud-hosted xMOOC service to run experimental in-house xMOOCs (11). Daniel says Google is already in touch with some of the universities involved in xMOOCs, although "the institutions are more close-mouthed about this collaboration" (11).

Partly because they serve different purposes, the two types of MOOCs have almost-opposite objectives for learning outcomes. On xMOOCs, learning is seen as something that can be tested and certified; while for cMOOCs, students "won't necessarily walk away with a fixed and tested set of specific skills or competencies, or knowledge of a set body of content" (Lugton, "What is a MOOC"). For a list of xMOOCs, the best current resource is *Class Central* (http://class-central.com), an aggregator of future and in-progress courses from Coursera, Udacity, edX, NovoED, and others.

A New Business Model

Generally, MOOCs differ from OpenCourseWare like MIT OpenCourseWare and Yale Open Courses in terms of their service. MOOC providers like Coursera and edX partner with universities to make some of their courses available online, and host these courses on a centralized course management platform. An OpenCourseWare, on the other hand, is usually hosted by its course-providing university and involves less or no interaction between the instructor and the students. On MOOCs, students complete any selected course over a specific duration of time (varies by course; may be anything between 5-18 weeks) whereas on an OpenCourseWare, students may consume the course materials at their own pace.

Providing more than an opportunity to learn, MOOCs are bringing attention to the cost of higher education by upending the notion of the traditional university registration. By reducing the cost of attention to almost nothing, MOOCs have created new models for business in the higher education context. The following graphic shows the major players

in the current world of MOOCs – venture capitals, nonprofit organizations and major

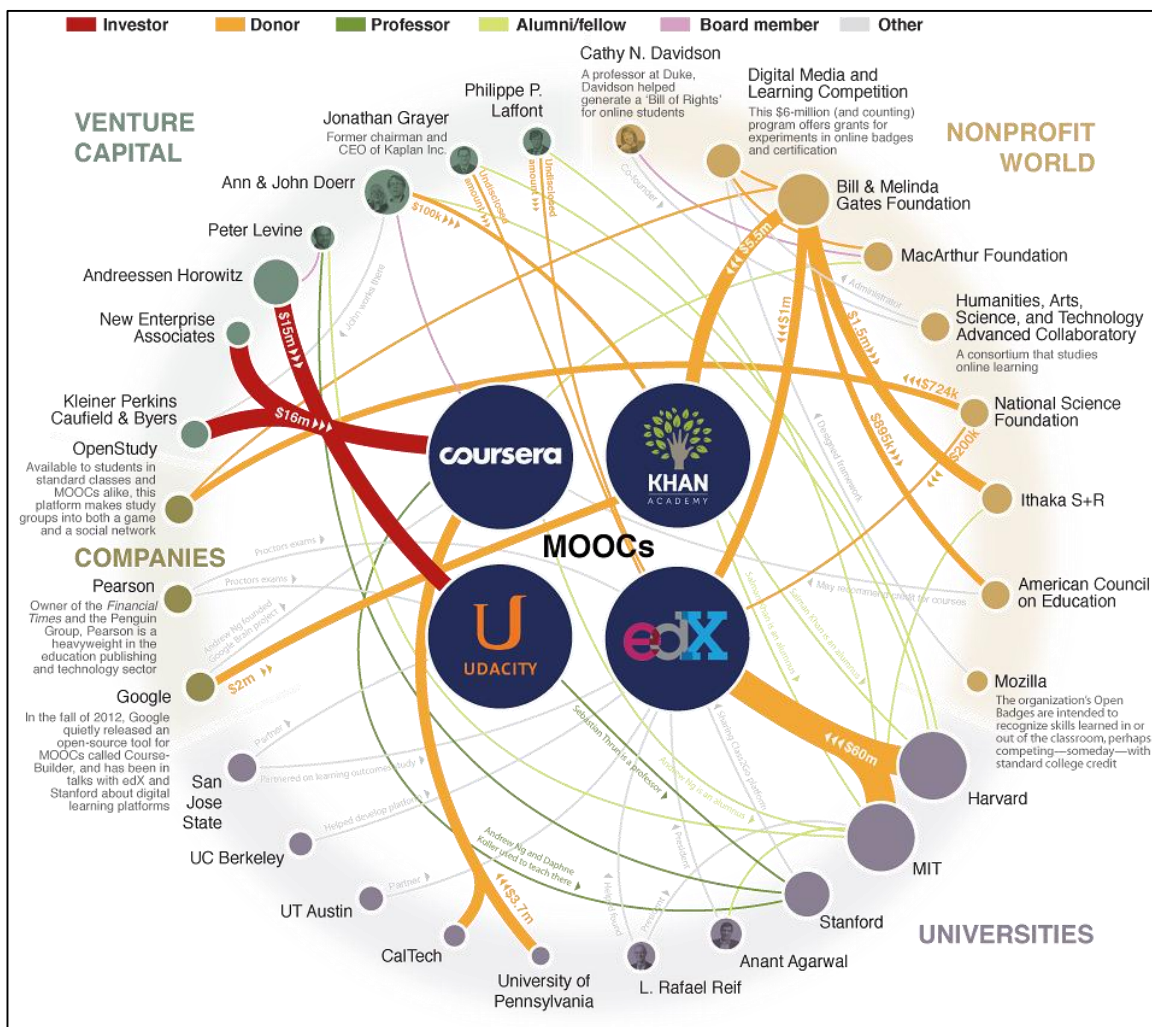participating universities – where all the knowledge and funding come from.

Figure 7

Major Players in the MOOC Universe

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the contract between MOOC providers

and their participating universities involves a list of possible strategies to generate

revenues, including but not limited to, certification fees, tutoring, sponsorships, advanced

track fees, and collaboration with third-party headhunters to introduce students to

potential employers and recruiters during or after the course is completed (Young, "Will

MOOCs Change"). Further, while this new business model help reduce the cost of

courses it offers, students may have to rely on peer reviews and peer assessments for

feedback on their work. In some instances, machine-grading methods may be employed

to diminish the labor of course instructors or community teaching assistants.

Chapter III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & RESEARCH DESIGN

Foucauldian Power

At the birth of new participatory media, there has been a strong political self-consciousness of the design of new technology, the design process, and the urge for a rich set of methods and tools for user-centered design (Kannabiran and Peterson 695). With the rise of mobile and cloud-based computing, the term design has extended its scope of concern beyond the process of graphics and into how users interact with the designed product in their daily routine, i.e. user interface design (UI) and user experience design (UX). Design is, at its core, political (Rith and Dubberly 72). Henry Jenkins, in his pivotal work, *Convergence Culture*, earmarked the commitment of new media design fields to view design as centered to user-involved by seeing the users as human actors rather than just human factors.

This project is an attempt to call to attention the need for a critical analysis and reflection to discuss, analyze, and reflect upon the politics at the MOOC platform. When it comes to power, rhetoricians would surely consider Michel Foucault, a key figure in the critical discourse of power relations. Foucault urges us to analyze local forms of power and the way they are constantly negotiated by individuals or other agencies in a

system. He argues that power must be viewed as "something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain… Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (Foucault, qtd. in Kannabiran and Peterson 696). Through the critical lens of Foucauldian power analysis, I will analyze the power relations enacted and contested among various entities (users, providers, content, etc.) in the MOOCs selected for this study to elicit the politics that happen at the platform.

<u>The Rhetoric of Technology
        and Online Instruction</u>

The Foucauldian power analytics is an important tool to study forms of power that is negotiated through the computer interface, but it is incomplete without perspectives of the rhetoric of technology. The rhetoric of technology is not a new discussion topic. For the last three decades, English composition teachers have been using computers in their classrooms to enable writers and readers to create, change, and comment on texts (Selfe and Selfe 66). As early as the 80s, computers were brought into the writing classroom to support student-centered learning and discursive practices, and to foster a more engaging and democratic learning experience. Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe have identified a rhetoric of technology that portrays computer-supported forums as democratic spaces, which Mary Louise Pratt might call "linguistic utopias" (55). As computers have become more prevalent in everyday life, schools have begun adopting computers as tools to develop higher order literacy and cognitive skills as objects of study (Selfe and Selfe 67).

"The Politics of the Interface" is a driving force behind this thesis project. Serving as a theoretical framework, Selfe and Selfe's article echoes the discussion that digital technologies are often involved in "establishing and maintaining borders," thus

"contributing to a larger cultural system of differential power that has resulted in the systematic domination and marginalization of certain groups of student" (65). This thesis represents my further interrogation of MOOCs as a way to open up conversations about power and its exercise in the electronic contact zone. My present motive is to study the maps of MOOC platforms and interfaces, in which Selfe and Selfe state as "cultural maps of computer systems," and "maps [that] are never ideologically innocent or inert" (68). Thus, I seek to problematize MOOC sites and their delivery methods as maps that seem to reinforce the privileged class and disclosing their role in the reinforcement of discursive privilege.

Nature and Limitations of the Study

By offering another critical perspective of MOOCs beyond the present arguments and frustrations about free online courses, this thesis project is an exploratory study of English composition MOOCs, which include Duke University's "English Composition: Achieving Expertise" (12 weeks), The Ohio State University's "Writing II: Rhetorical Composing" (10 weeks), and Georgia Institute of Technology's "First-Year Composition 2.0" (8 weeks).

Following a qualitative research approach, which involves the use of critical-analytical examination as the primary method, I present an autoethnographic narrative as a student in Georgia Tech's "First-Year Composition 2.0," which ran from May 27 to July 24, 2013. Through the critical lens of Foucauldian power analysis and Selfe and Selfe's rhetoric of the interface, I will present own attitudes and feelings involved in the process of observation and analysis to draw inferences of a writer-scholar's engagement with MOOC interfaces. Since Georgia Tech's composition course was offered through

Coursera, the analysis in the study would be more appropriately geared toward

xMOOCs, though some observations of political and ideological "boundary lands

associated with computer interfaces [and MOOC interfaces]" (Selfe and Selfe 65) would

still apply to cMOOCs.

A Phenomenological Approach

      The theoretical perspective most often associated with qualitative research is

phenomenology. Following the phenomenological approach, researchers seek to

understand the meaning in events and in human interactions. The context is important to

the interpretation of data. Hence, this study requires me to center on the attempt to

achieve a sense of meaning, in using MOOCs, given my positions as a graduate student

and an English composition instructor. The narrative data from this study are translated

into themed concepts that illuminate the power and ideology residing in the MOOC

platform. Many scholars have acknowledged that studies using qualitative methods are

not only admissible and appropriate, but have added vitality as well as knowledge to the

field of education. The data collected in this project have included more than words;

attitudes, feelings and emotions of the researcher will be involved in the process of

observation and analysis. These processes are blended throughout the study. This

approach encourages flexibility so the researcher can move in new directions as more

information and a better understanding of what are relevant observations are acquired.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

Structure of 'First-Year Composition 2.0'

     According to Georgia Tech's Center for 21st Century Universities, Georgia Tech

signed an agreement with Coursera July 2012 to put their web-based courses online and

"create new opportunities for hands-on learning in the classroom ("Georgia Tech Signs

Agreement with Coursera"). Georgia Tech's "First-Year Composition 2.0" was an 8-

week course led by Karen Head, assistant professor in the Georgia Tech's School of

Literature, Media, and Communication and director of the Writing and Communication

Program's institute-wide Communication Center. Funded by the Gates Foundation to

develop a course for composition, the MOOC aimed to help students "develop a better

process and gain confidence in written, visual, and oral communication and to create and

critique documents and presentations in college, in the workplace, and in [their]

community" ("About the Course"). To complete the course, students need to draft and

devise the following assignments: a personal essay, an image, and an oral (recorded)

presentation.

     According to the course information page on Coursera, this course aimed to help

its participants develop confidence in the following areas:

- Critical Thinking: Evaluate the effectiveness of personal essays, images, and oral presentations. Assess student's own work and the work of his/her peers. Reflect on student's own processes and performance.

- Rhetoric: Analyze the ways in which the student and other communicators use persuasion. Think about and use context, audience, purpose, argument, genre, organization, design, visuals, and conventions.

- Process: Apply processes (read, invent, plan, draft, design, rehearse, revise, publish, present, and critique).

- Digital Media: Produce written, oral, and visual artifacts.

("About the Course")

This course consisted of two short introductory videos (a welcome video and a technology video), 24 ten-minute videos (three videos per week), plus approximately eight 20-to-30-minute recorded "Hangout" discussion sessions. These videos were complemented by additional written, oral, and visual materials; student activities; and web-based assessments. The following shows the course outline:

- Week One: Establishing Concepts, Practices, and Learning Goals
  Assignments: Self- Assessment Surveys & Personal Benchmark Statement

- Weeks Two & Three: Written Communication
  Major Assignment – Personal Philosophy Essay

- Weeks Four & Five: Visual Communication
  Major Assignment – Personal Philosophy Visual

- Weeks Six & Seven: Oral Communication
  Major Assignment – Personal Philosophy Recorded Presentation

- Week Eight: Reflection

  Assignment – Re-visit the Self-Assessment Surveys and Personal Benchmark

  Statement

  ("About the Course")

It was strongly recommended that students possess fluent English language literacy as well as grammatical and mechanical knowledge. It was highlighted in its Frequently Asked Questions that students would be given references to check mechanics and grammar. However, this course focused on creating effective writing, visuals, and oral presentations. It was also mentioned students need familiarity with a basic word-processing program (for example, Word, OpenOffice, Google Docs, Pages), basic image software (for example, PowerPoint, iPhoto, Photoshop, Picasa) or cameras (for example, smartphones, digital cameras), and basic audio recording software (for example, Audacity, GarageBand) in order to succeed in this MOOC.

The majority of the readings required for this MOOC were extracted from an online open textbook developed by Joseph Moxley from the University of South Florida – *Writing Commons* (http://writingcommons.org). It is also worth mentioning that the instructional team of this MOOC made it clear to students that this course was not intended as a replacement of a credit-bearing writing class at any university. Students, however, were encouraged to keep their work for potential review by their respective educational institutions:

> It is not intended as a substitute for a for-credit composition course at any college or university. Even though this course is not intended to be given college credit, it can demonstrate that you have learned a great deal. To keep a record of your accomplishments in this course, you should create a portfolio of your written, visual, and oral assignments. At some colleges and universities, your portfolio may form a portion of a case you might make for potential transfer credit. Every

college has its own policy for acceptance of transfer or examination credit.
("About this Course")

To complete the MOOC with a Statement of Accomplishment (it was called Certificate of Completion in this course), participants needed to earn at least 70% by the end of the course. To earn a Statement of Accomplishment with Distinction (or Certificate of Distinction), participants needed to finish with at least 90%.

Power and the Platform

Based on Foucault's works, the notion of power can be said to be characteristic of the following (Kannabiran and Peterson 695). First, power should be viewed as a strategy, not a possession; it is something that needs to be constantly performed and not merely attained. Second, according to Kannabiran and Peterson, power circulates and operates in the form of a network permeating through the various levels of the system rather than being just located in an institution or possessed by an individual (696). Third, power is enacted and actively contested among various agents in a system; it may not be simply applied to someone or something. Forth, in Foucault's own words, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault 95). The presence of multiple points of resistance is a necessary condition for power to exist and such resistance should not be reduced to an anomaly or to a single source of rebellion. And fifth, Foucault coins a new compound term called "power/knowledge" which he characterizes as the conjunction of power relations and knowledge production. "It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power," he states in "Truth and Power" (Foucault 52). In this formulation of power and knowledge, I have experienced how knowledge is an integral part of power relations.

When I first logged on to the "First-Year Composition 2.0" MOOC (herein onward abbreviated as FYC 2.0) around 2:00 p.m. on May 27, 2013 to check out the populated course site on Coursera, I felt overwhelmed by the content on the course site as well as the already-busy forums, which were filled with exciting greetings and replies from enrolled students. As the instructional team welcomed these students to the course, they announced that a few of the (estimated) 50,000 students will be handpicked by the instructor to participate in the weekly Hangout session – a virtual meeting conducted over Google Hangout to discuss course questions and concerns.

> *The Composition 2.0 team will contact a few students (likely those who have been particularly active in the course, through forum participation or early assignment submission) and invite those students to virtually meet up with members of the instructional team and discuss course content, questions, and concerns.*
> (Recorded in my journal, from Week 1 Announcements.)

Given this feature, the course site seemed to me like a platform for those who are more knowledgeable in maneuvering and navigating the site to establish a more powerful presence that might later benefit them by helping them earn – for the lack of a term – some brownie points from the instructor. In this sense, the MOOC site is nothing less than a competitive learning community, where students strive to earn the attention of the instructor, who is deemed the power figure in the community.

The Foucauldian power analytics frames the student as another active stakeholder who takes part in the negotiation of power relations. By "taking lead" in contributing to discussions and completing required assignments, a student is making a claim of power. This power may allow them to gain an edge in the MOOC experience – to be selected as a participant of the virtual meeting, hopefully.

In discussing internal relationships of power within the classroom (or a learning space), Paul Trowler and Ali Cooper identified power relations as an integral aspect of teaching and learning regimes. The teacher – as the expert, accessor, curriculum designer, and designer of learning tasks – often achieve their dominance being the "guru" by creating sets of expectations (or rules) that ensure the students are maintained in a subjugated position (Trowler and Cooper).

Throughout the 8-week course, I have experienced the form of power enactment that came from the design of the course format, i.e. a student must have submitted his/her major assignment draft before he/she can participate in the peer review section of the assignment. Due to my preparation for the 2013 Computers and Writing Conference, which happened during the second week of FYC 2.0, I was unable to view the weekly modules and complete the assignments on time. Because I did not submit a draft, I was not able to review my peers' work for the week. Even though I would like to still review others' work, the system simply did not allow me to do so. As a result, I was docked points from the overall grade for not submitting an assignment draft *and* not participating in the peer review – which was involuntary. In my journal, I wrote with furiousness,

> *I find this design inflexible for students who missed a deadline unintentionally. Whereas in a traditional, in-class writing course, the instructor would most likely still make up something for these students so they may participate in the coming week's activities. Would you shut out a student just because he/she missed an activity in the prior session? Inflexibility – I think this is where this MOOC falls short.*

In the perspective of Foucauldian power analytics, *discipline* can be identified as a type of power, a "modality" of its exercise, which comprises a set of procedures or techniques; it is an "anatomy" of power, a technology that contributes to the process of disindividualization (Foucault 215). Such process promotes the facelessness of the

bureaucrat. In my scenario, I was punished, or disciplined, by the course assignment submission protocol for not abiding by the rules. Power was inherent in the course structure itself, rather than the instructor.

The concrete arrangement that makes up the system of discipline in FYC 2.0 MOOC can also be investigated from Foucault's concept of bio-power. In the development of capitalism, Foucault saw the body as an essential element in the formation of the machinery of production and the adjustment of the society to economic purposes (141). To ease the process of governance, the developers and instructional team of the MOOC have had methods of power capable of optimizing student behaviors and aptitudes, hence ensured the maintenance of power relations between the students and the MOOC team. In Foucault's term, students of FYC 2.0 MOOC may be subjected to anatomo-politics, created to guarantee hierarchy across the learning platform and sustain hegemony in administration. For this reason, a student in this MOOC may feel controlled by the system as they are situated in such an arrangement (i.e. the assignment submission and peer review processes) that enforces a power relation between the user and the system.

On the one hand, Foucauldian power analysis is specifically well suited to study forms of power that is negotiated through the user-system interactions immersed in the MOOC context, but on the other hand, it does not drive home in exploring the politics and ideologies of the MOOC platform as a social learning environment. The following sections serve to fill this gap by studying the boundaries enacted by the MOOC platform as mapped gestures, as elaborated in Selfe and Selfe's article.

Mapping the Infrastructural Ideologies
        at the MOOC Platform

In "The Politics of the Interface," Selfe and Selfe provided an extended example of computer interfaces as cultural maps that are "never ideologically innocent or inert" (68). Mapped both implicitly and explicitly, Selfe and Selfe described computer systems as a complex set of material relations among culture, technology, and technology users. The maps of computer interfaces serve to order the virtual world "according to a certain set of historical and social values" found in our existing culture (Selfe and Selfe 68). As such, map users read, and use, these cultural information just as they would with physical, geographical information – "though a coherent set of stereotyped images" that designers of the maps offer as direct representation of the world (68), of learning cultures, of social organizing tendencies, and of a culture's historical development (Wood 145).

All MOOC-providing platforms – including Coursera, Udacity, and edX – like any other computer systems, have an inbuilt set of cultural information powered by political beliefs. As an active agent that is involved in the constant negotiation of power, a MOOC platform actively prohibits or promotes, vocalizes or silences, makes visible or hides user actions and motives – making it an active agent with a specific inbuilt political stance (Kannabiran and Peterson 696). Given this understanding, I recognize the importance in identifying the cultural information passed along in the maps of the platform, especially because this information has the ability to reproduce – through different discursive levels – the asymmetrical power relations that have been exposed by the Foucauldian power analysis in the above section. I agree with Selfe and Selfe that these power relations shape the educational system teachers labor within that students are exposed to (68). Following their call to educate students to be technology critics as well

as technology users, I maintain that educators need to examine the "naturalizing

functions of computer interfaces" (Selfe and Selfe 69) and "break the frame to extend the

discursive horizon" (Laclau and Mouffe 19) of the MOOC platform we have adopted and

that, in turn, recreates us and our students. Grounded in these attitudes, I turn to my field

notes and memories from my summer undertaking to try to unpack the MOOC platform

as maps of marginalization by privileging certain socio-class and cultures, discursive

expressions, and ways of thinking.

The Platform as Maps of Class
        Privilege and Capitalism

        In general, the MOOC platform reflects modern corporate culture and thus

orienting the graphical user interface along an existing axis of class privilege. To

illustrate my arguments, the following shows a several screenshots of FYC 2.0 MOOC

and the orientation of the platform.

Figure 8

Screenshot of FYC 2.0 MOOC Video Modules Page

Figure 9

Screenshot of FYC 2.0 MOOC "Planning and Organizing Oral

Presentation" Video Lecture

Figure 10

Screenshot of FYC 2.0 MOOC Forum Page

The FYC 2.0 MOOC interfaces shown above are identical to most, if not all, MOOCs

offered through Coursera. These interfaces, and the software applications built within the

site (forum dashboards, video players, etc.), map the MOOC as a rich site of knowledge.

It represents a repository of resources and tools that can help a student succeed in

learning the subject matter.

However, beyond the digital replication of a library-like storehouse of

information, the course site also constructs a virtual reality – one that Selfe and Selfe

argue is constituted by and for white middle- and upper-class users "to replicate a world

that they know and feel comfortable within" (69). And I add – these interfaces are also

framed in the perspective of western philosophy. The ideological orientation of the

objects represented in the MOOC site exemplifies those familiar primarily to the

"white-collar inhabitants of that corporate culture" (Selfe and Selfe 69): cogwheels for

setting, speakers for volume, photo frames for image slideshow, etc.

Table 1

Some Icons Found within FYC 2.0 MOOC Interface

Icons	Meanings
	Male-looking avatar – represents user profile
	Speech bubbles – represent participant's latest forum activities (comments, replies, new topics, etc.)
	Cogwheel – represents settings
	Question mark – represents unresolved forum thread(s)
↑ 1 ↓ · flag	Up and down arrows – represent "thumb-up" and "thumb-down" of forum comments/replies; presumably, more up arrows denotes a "good contributor" and may increases that user's chances to participant in virtual meeting with instructor
	Four straight lines – represent video subtitles in word text format Four bulleted lines – represent video subtitles in SupRip text format Down arrow with hard-disk – represent download lecture video in MP4 format
	Picture frame – represents download lecture slideshow
	Lowercase "I" – represents help (information needed)
	Acronym "CC" – represents closed caption (in-video subtitles)

The power of these ideological representations can only be grasped when we evaluate

what they *do not* symbolize. For example, the interface does not represent the world of

learning in terms of an old shack or cottage, a temple, a kitchen countertop, or a prison

cell – each of which would constitute the virtual world of learning in different terms.

   Along the corporate culture, built into MOOC interface are also semiotic

messages that orientate the user along the axis of race and gender, cultural traditions, and

their significance in the digital learning community. The following screenshots show an

apple-to-apple comparison across three composition MOOCs offered through Coursera

and their course interfaces.

Figure 11

Screenshot of Duke's "English Composition I" MOOC

Figure 12

Screenshot of Georgia Tech's FYC 2.0 MOOC

Figure 13

Screenshot of Ohio State's "Writing II" MOOC

It is apparent that these interfaces have one thing in common – they are text-heavy and constitute a virtual reality of organized thoughts. Such associations to white-collar culture may cast out any femininity and nonlinear organizational practices. Users of color and users from a less-masculine society, as well as those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, may find it more challenging to use the platform to its fullest potential compared to users from while culture who are familiar with corporate-oriented computer systems. For these marginalized users, entering the world of MOOC interfaces means – to some extend – "entering a world constituted around the lives and values of white, make, middle- and upper-class professionals" (Selfe and Selfe 70). These users, who navigate the maps of class privilege in terms other than their own cultural understanding, submit to an interested version of reality represented by white supremacy.

In "The Politics of the Interface," Selfe and Selfe also argue that the corporate orientation of the interface is ideologically associated with capitalism (70). Similarly, in FYC 2.0 MOOC, I observed how student's works are treated seen as commodity as established by Jay Bolter (1): the writer who creates the assignment "owns" the information product, and that product can be passed on and transferred to a different ownership, respectively, during the peer review and assignment submission processes. According to Coursera's Terms of Use (available www.coursera.org/about/terms), students are forced to agree to let their submitted works be used by Coursera and the course-offering institution under a non-exclusive license. The terms state:

> With respect to User Content you submit or otherwise make available in connection with your use of the Site, and subject to the Privacy Policy, you grant Coursera and the Participating Institutions a fully transferable, worldwide, perpetual, royalty-free and non-exclusive license to use, distribute, sublicense, reproduce, modify, adapt, publicly perform and publicly display such User Content. (Coursera, "User Material Submission")

As authorship becomes a growing concern for institutions that offer courses via a provider such as Coursera, these institutions are taking precautious steps to prevent undesired lost of intellectual property to third-party organizations. For instance, for Ohio State's "Writing II" MOOC, the instructional team had utilized an in-house assignment submission application called WEx – short for Writers Exchange – to keep student works from ending in the hands of their MOOC provider, Coursera. When I met Cynthia Selfe at the 2013 Computers and Writing Conference at Frostburg State University, Maryland, she explained that WEx allows students to turn in their assignments and review works of their peers without having to fear that Coursera may use their works without acknowledgement. Truly, the commodification of information or intellectual property

through MOOC interfaces has taught users to acquire their own authority and value

their works within a capitalist economy.

The Platform as Maps of Rationalism
        and Logocentrism

        The MOOC interfaces, as shown through the screenshots in the previous section,

are also oriented with the values of rationality and logocentrism, along with ostensible

characteristics of Western patriarchal cultures. Selfe and Selfe contend that representing

knowledge in a way that is fundamentally dependent on a hierarchical perspective – in

association with patriarchal cultures and rationalistic tradition – privileges "rationality

and logic as fundamental ways of knowing," which "function to exclude other ways of

knowing" (74). My experience with FYC 2.0 MOOC has been an agonizing journey that

opened my eyes to the logicality built into the way the course works. As much as I would

like to finish watching all the lecture videos each week during the course, I was not

allowed to proceed until I have answered the questions asked at the built-in "Check In

Moments" during these videos. Besides, as I have described in the Foucauldian power

analysis section, I was forced to review my peers' works until I have submitted a draft of

the assignment for the particular module. These examples of linear progression and

logical philosophy to learning reflect a validation of rationality and logocentrism as the

authorized contexts for knowing in MOOCs – where a student must follow the

undeviating route designed by the interface programmer and instructional team in order

to succeed in the course.

        Further, this conventional validation of hierarchy, rationality, and logic as a way

to represent knowledge acquisition within the MOOC environment excludes other ways

of knowing, such as association, intuition, or bricolage (Selfe and Selfe 74). In

Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design, Terry

Winograd and Fernando Flores note that rationalistic framework that informs computer

interface design is "based on a misinterpretation of the nature of human cognition and

language," one that contributes to "major breakdown in the design of computer

technology – a breakdown that reveals the rationalistically oriented background of

discourse within which our current understanding of [computer interface] is embedded"

(78-79). Thomas Landauer, in studying the relations between cognitive psychology and

computer system design, also makes a point that, "in attempting to provide greater 'user

friendliness,' designers and programmers have indeed paid more attention to the usability

of their systems, and in doing so have exploited the much expanded power of the systems

with which they work" (1). He points out that most efforts to enhance usability have been

"done without much basis other than individual designer intuition and common sense" (1-

2). Because computer programmers are taught to solve problems using hierarchical

approaches to problem solving and to represent relationships in programs within a strict

syntactical system of linear prepositional logic (Turkle and Papert 129), the "formal,

propositional" way of knowledge construction has become a "canonical style" (133) for

programmers who represent information in a linear tradition. Thus, when this

propositional way of organizing knowledge is duplicated on the MOOC platform, users

are forced to adopt a way of thinking synonymous to propositional reasoning when

interpreting the information on MOOCs. Such phenomenon becomes a problem when

users, as well as programmers, come to see this linear, rational, and logical thinking not

as *one* way of knowing but as the *only* way of knowing.

Nevertheless, on a brighter note, recent advancements in UI and UX designing have seen initiatives taken to explore non-hierarchical and *less* linear approaches to programming user interface. An example of such leads would be Prezi (http://prezi.com), a Hungarian software company that produced a cloud-based presentation platform for presenting ideas on a virtual canvas. Using "zoomable" user interface (ZUI), a graphical environment where users can change the scale of the viewed area in order to see more detail or less, and browse through different documents, Prezi's canvas allows users to display and navigate through information within a 2.5D or parallax 3D space. Such fashion for re-visualization of information reimagines the ordinary, linear, slide-based presentation. Another example of a change in visualizing content is the recent Internet meme culture whereby an expression of speech is packaged into a combination of image(s) and short phrases, virally transmitted by the means of the Internet. These new patterns of storytelling open up new possibilities to organizing information that are otherwise constrained by the limitations inherent in relying on hierarchical approaches.

Accordingly, non-linear thinking may increase possible learning outcomes by not being certain about the starting point for any logical process. Implemented into the design of MOOC interface, this orientation – that is different from logocentric mapping of information – can present alternative approaches to constructing meaning. Yet, where the MOOC platform falters is not just its deficiency in presenting a class-neutral, bias-free structure of arranging information, but also its contribution to favoring certain discourse of politics made increasingly systematic by the orientation of its interface. The following section critiques the primary language used in MOOCs – English – that contributes to the tendency to belittle other cultures.

The Platform as Maps of
        Discursive Privilege

Given the characteristics of the interface as a map of class privilege, it is also aligned with discursive constraints that reproduce the privileged position of Standard English as the language of choice or default across MOOC platforms. As a non-native speaker who is strained to read and write, and to correspond with other MOOC participants, primarily in English, I testify to the challenges ESL (English as Second Language) students face in their MOOC-taking experience. Based on my observation and familiarity with Coursera, there is not any on-site support or resources that can help a non-native speaker better understand the course materials and assignment requirements. While not much was known about the demographics of MOOC students across the board – since providers like Coursera, Udacity, etc. have refrained from releasing student profile information – we are informed by individual institutions who have partnered with these providers to offer a course, and have released independent student demographic information, that number of non-English speaking students enrolling in MOOCs is on the rise. Published by OnlineSchools.com, the following infographic shows a snapshot of MOOC student demographic based on aggregated survey results from *New York Times, The Chronicle of Higher Education,* and *Huffington Post*.
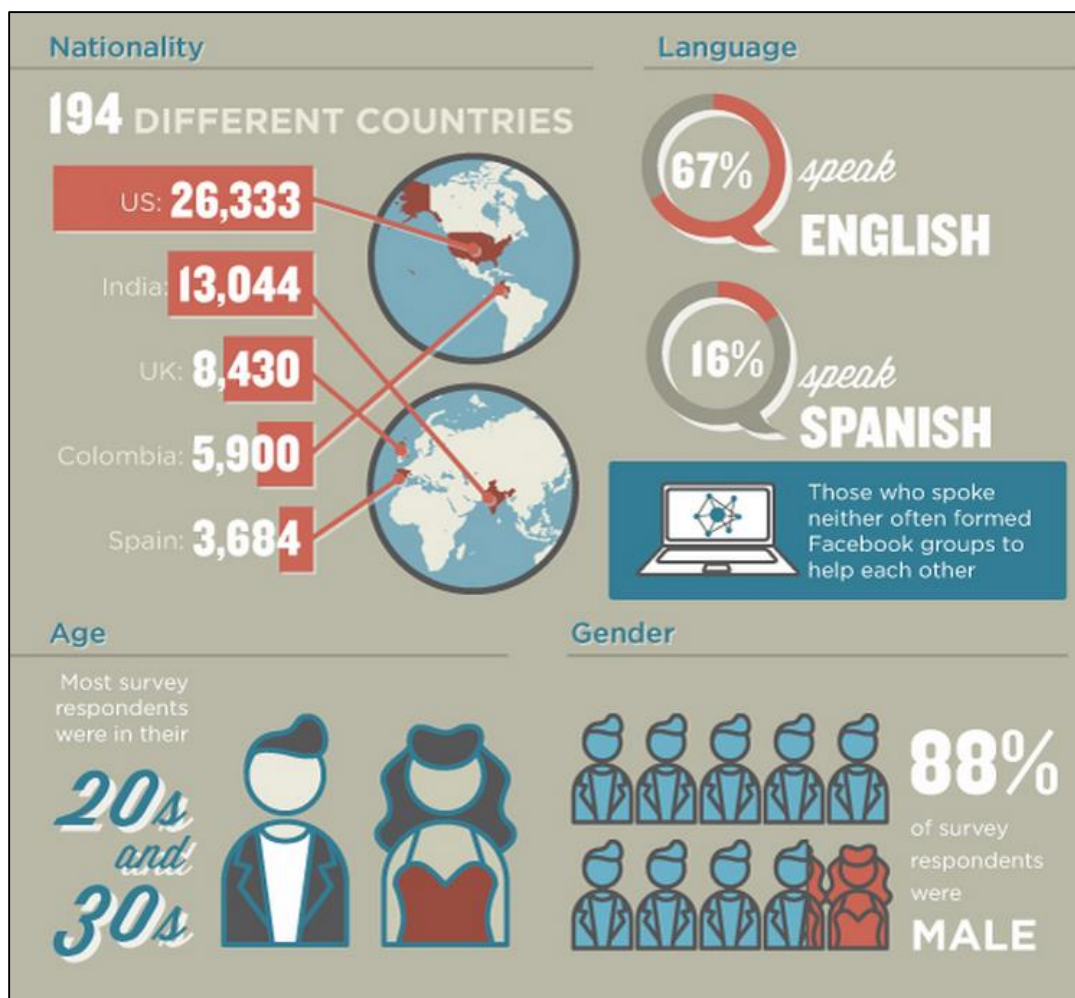
Figure 14

Infographic of MOOC Student Demographic

Clearly, a considerable number of students do not speak English at the time of their participation in MOOCs. For these students, they turn to their own "support groups" outside of the course site to help each other learn better.

As Selfe and Selfe contend, privileging one language as the default system language contributes to the "tendency to ignore, or even erase, the cultures of non-English language background speakers in this country" (71). When a student is asked to

watch a lecture video or write a response to an article in a language not of his or her

native tongue, the student is immersed in a foreign culture that tend to disregard the

student's own cultural values. By employing English as a default language, as articulated,

MOOC interfaces may – consciously or not – marginalize non-English language speaking

students as the "Other" (Selfe and Selfe 72), and it has evident implications for both the

course providers and the students. Both parties assume a "default position" whereby the

course instructional team expects students from other races and cultures who participate

in the MOOC to abide by the local traditions and academic standards, and the students on

the other hand, would "submit to the colonial power of language and adopt English as

their primary means of communication" (Selfe and Selfe 72). Sticking to English as the

principal language for exchange means to de-value linguistic diversity and see non-

English users as Other within the MOOC learning environment.

As an Eastern Asian, I have been trained to read scripts both horizontally and

vertically. Traditionally, Chinese are written vertically in columns going from top to

bottom and ordered from right to left. Yet, none of the MOOCs I have seen have

attempted to challenge the popularized, western text direction. Thus, they further

reinforce the interested representation constituted around white culture, forcing non-

English speaking users to submit to a supremacy that marginalizes their respective ways

of thinking.

As I recall, the reading and writing language was not the only challenge I

encountered as a non-standard language speaker in the FYC 2.0 MOOC. I also struggled

to follow the given benchmarks for evaluating other students' works. As every FYC 2.0

MOOC student was required to complete a peer-review training module before the

student could begin reviewing other peers' assignments, I had a hard time passing the

training because I was not assigning the ideal scores for each section of the calibration

practice. In the end, after failing to meet the peer review standards, I was still allowed

proceed to grade my peers' works. See below:

Your evaluation could be better. Look for feedback embedded in the page.

You did not pass training. It's important for peer evaluations to be done carefully.

→ Go on to peer evaluation
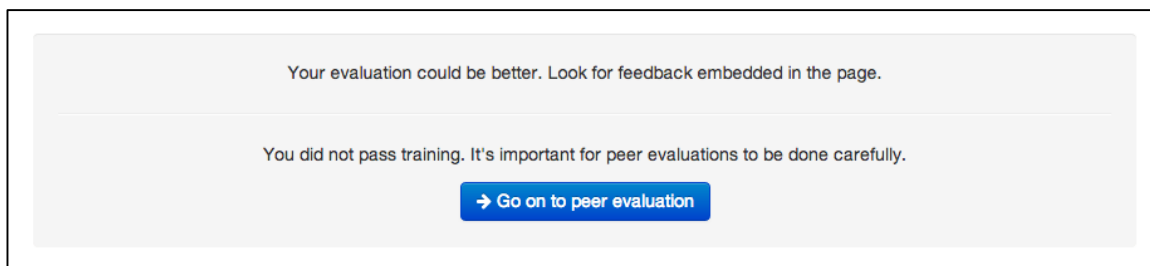
Figure 15

Screenshot of My Peer Review Training Module Dialogue Box

In my journal, I recorded my frustrations:

> *I am amazed (not in a positive sense) by the standards that have been set in this calibration and thought that this could be very rigid for students like me. Especially for a visual assignment, I feel that there is no "one right way" to grade any work by the student. The fact that we have to grade according to the MOOC team's standards makes me feel withdrawn.*

Just as it was for English as the primary language of delivery, I also felt it was unfair to

privilege a particular grading rubric – especially when visual works are subjective to

cultural values. Teaching students – native and non-native English speakers – to use

specific assessment criteria in this case is doing a disservice to the students and their

learning.

Although global expansion of technology use, as shown in today's MOOC cases,

is exerting an increasingly strong influence on computer design and computer languages,

the reactions to such influence are slow. Recognizing language barriers can be real

obstacles for learning, Coursera have set up a Global Translation Partners Program, in

partnership with a host of translation companies, non-profits, philanthropic organizations,

corporations, and universities from around the world. Though, this program is still in its

infancy as Coursera states on their official site:

> We *will be* teaming up with these partners to translate complete lectures from
> selected courses into Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Kazakh, Portuguese, Russian,
> Turkish, Ukrainian and many more languages to come. ("Global Translation
> Partners Program," emphasis added.)

Given the rapid growth in number of students taking MOOCs, support programs like this

and other resources need to be made available to students by the soonest possible so they

can maximize their learning experience.

MOOCs as an Electronic Linguistic
    Contact Zone

    Coming to examine the boundaries enacted by the MOOC platform from the

perspective of non-dominant groups in the online learning community, I have identified

the ideological gesture of the platform's map as a flawed representation of reality, built to

reinforce certain interested vision and for the benefit of the dominant culture. As an open

learning community, current MOOCs present the characteristics of a linguistic contact

zone – where "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, … in contexts of highly

asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 34). Through available means of interaction,

students learn to work with one another and discover their place in the learning

community. Based on my observations in the previous sections, it is clear that MOOCs

work within a range of existing cultural and dominant forces. Nonetheless, it is also

important to consider how well MOOCs serve as a platform for socialization.

In resisting MOOCs, Jennifer Morton writes in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* about the social and behavioral competencies that students in online classes develop and *don't develop* – as compared to their peers in traditional face-to-face courses:

> A college education bestows not just cognitive skills—mathematical, historical, and scientific knowledge—but practical skills—social, emotional, and behavioral competencies. Tenacious, confident, and socially competent employees have an edge over equally cognitively talented employees who lack those practical skills. What students cannot learn online are precisely those social skills. (Morton, "Unequal Classrooms")

Morton thinks that taking a MOOC is like sitting in a large lecture hall being lectured by a professor who doesn't know her student's name. She argues that since higher education is supposed to be a place where students from lower-income families to go and learn to socialize and engage with middle-class social norms, the adoption of online education by large public university will threaten to harm the very students for whom higher education is an essential leg up into the middle class. Because MOOC students are believed to not be able to socialize with other peers online, Morton contends that children from impoverished communities will not be able to pick up the desired social skills in the online education context. She also believes that such social skills are key competencies that would make students a "good fit" for their future workplace (Morton, "Unequal Classrooms").

Yet, my experience with FYC 2.0 MOOC begs to offer an opposite point of view. It may be a stretch to think that students cannot learn the types of social and behavioral competencies that Morton enlists for an online setting. It will be more accurate to perceive students who study primarily or entirely online will learn a set of social skills, but ones that are very different than the set traditionally developed in face-to-face

education. Towards the end of the 8-week FYC 2.0 MOOC, I came across an

interesting instance by which I saw the connected learning theory in practice. Several

students on the course found it difficult to keep up with the assignments and announced

their withdrawals from the MOOC via the course discussion forum. Soon after these

declarations happened, other MOOC students started encouraging these students to

endure the challenges. While some students insisted that they were not apt enough to

using the technology needed to produce the assignment, there were other students in the

course who offered help to these quitting students to help solve their technological

challenges. For one student, the help she had received meant so much to her that she

made that a part of her final assignment – a recorded oral presentation – as a way to thank

her peers for offering help to her. The following is a screenshot of her transcript:

> The script I prepared for my video presentation. I couldn't have done it with out the help of my fellow students here at the forum. I hope you like it!
>
> Today my presentation will differ from the original essay called Grandparenting = Shock and Awe. Due to my continuing journey, the struggle along the way and the resulting positive outcome during this coursera I am compelled to share the better story.
>
> I would like to talk about perseverance and never giving up which children do all the time. Last week I was on the brink of throwing in the towel, of facing failure and of accepting defeat. I realized I wasn't able to complete this video section of the course. I ran out of time in the draft stage and felt stress over not completing the task.
>
> I wrote a fair well letter to the forum expressing my thoughts about my situation, my fears to be on camera, my disdain of the sound of my voice when recorded, my 20% deduction after an almost perfect mark in the second part of the course. All these things determined my fate, or so I thought.
>
> Once I posted my letter to the forum under the thread "I Bid Fair Well" I started receiving comments, not just one or two but an abundance of letters from fellow students encouraging me to keep going. One after another voiced their concern about giving up and used words of kindness and urgency motivating me to carry on. Heart felt words, sharing their fears and challenges with their own video assignments. Relaying to me and others how they struggled with the technical side or missed the deadline or faced fears being on camera.
>
> I was in such awe from the response I new I couldn't give up, I had to push to finish, to pay homage to the friends I had never met in person but gained through the forum. After all children don't give up, they falter they fall but they get up and try again. I watch my grandchild do this all the time and I suppose this would be my lesson from her too.
>
> I have learned so much from this experience! A sense of Community that has grown through this journey, the people who really care and share. The friends who support when times get tough. This is what is the most important lesson, not how I look or sound or even what my opinion is on grand parenting.
>
> I hope you all got the chance to feel the love from this community and grow along with it. I hope you learned a lot about yourselves and each other because that is what really counts in education. Marks are important because it gives a quantitative measure but we can't measure the act giving or kindness and good will towards others.
>
> This is the greatest lesson I have learned through this journey and I thank you all for teaching it to me!

(Actual video can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMnbCG8wfrQ)

Figure 16

Screenshot of a Student's Confession

This instance serves as an example of socialization that happens within a MOOC environment. While it does not necessarily speaks for everyone who took this MOOC, the experience of this student testifies to the notion that online socialization is key to successful learning experience. The student also said in her video description that, "the kindness of strangers and a strong community in the forum" was what helped her to "muster the strength to continue on and finish the task (assignment)."

While this incident was more than heartening, it is, as I see it, one of the opportunities for us to recognize – and to teach MOOC users to recognize – the interface as an interested map of our culture and as a linguistic contact zone that is socially organized with "particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms" (Giroux 30). Following Selfe and Selfe's call, as teachers of English, we need to teach our students and ourselves how to navigate the maps of the interface. Based on the observations and findings presented in this chapter, I would like to spend the last part of this thesis identifying a few insights and practical implications that might be useful for future MOOC programmers, teachers, as well as students.

Chapter V

IMPLICATIONS

<u>Implications for Designers</u>

Having analyzed and pointed out the specific deficiencies in current MOOC

platforms through the critical lens of Foucauldian power analytics and Selfe and Selfe's

rhetoric of technology, our next steps should aim toward remapping and renegotiating the

borders within interfaces. One of the ways to come to this realization is through working

with computer specialists, especially those who are in the position of designing and

programming the MOOC platforms, to "redesign, reimagine, and recreate" (Selfe and

Selfe 77) interfaces that attempt to avoid disabling and devaluing non-white, non-English

speaking, and minority users.

Since the Foucauldian power analytics frames the software designer as another

active stakeholder who takes part in the negotiation of power relations, there are two

major implications for UI/UX (user interface, user experience) designers, instructional

designers, and those who provide technical support to users during a MOOC. First, these

individuals must acknowledge that, inevitably, their political stances, beliefs and

prejudices, and cultural values and practices, get woven into the designed system; such

acknowledgement would help them gain a "critical distance" (Kannabiran and Peterson

697) between themselves and the designed system/interface. Second, since the designer

is seen as "another stakeholder" in the power mesh –not the sole creator of the interface –

they should also acknowledge the influence of other stakeholders, including funders,

corporate leaders, scholars, the government, nonprofit advocates, and users, as active and

volitional agents in the design process. This way, designers can play the role of a

negotiator – an agent who realizes the marginalized and oppressed groups represented

within the MOOC community – and engages directly in conversations with software

manufacturers, vendors, and educators to influence MOOC design and programming

efforts.

In the perspective of the politics at the interface, designers and technologists are

encouraged to be cyber-ethnographers who conduct broad-based surveys of user

experience and observe computer users in their natural habitat – in highly complex,

socially organized settings. An example of such an approach could be Contextual Inquiry

(Beyer and Holtzblatt), which provides designers with a series of tools and techniques for

understanding social settings and organizing their observations to derive models for

design. It offers a set of methods whereby designers can move out from laboratory

settings to the real world as a basis for design inspiration. By working with educators and

students who use MOOCs, designers and programmers can uncover constraints *and*

opportunities faced in a particular interface or feature, and work toward designing better,

more inclusive platforms for the future.

Implications for Educators

Scholars who use MOOCs and educators who teach by integrating MOOC

features in their classrooms should begin studying the maps of MOOC platforms in a

critical light to identify the many layers of culture and ideology they represent, as articulated in my previous chapter. Quoted by Selfe and Selfe, Denis Wood suggests, "the greatest difficulty of all comes when we understand that we must locate ourselves in relation to the map" (76-77). Educators, before they choose to use MOOCs as an educational tool in their curriculum, need to ask themselves where they stand within the territory of a larger colonial landscape of technology.

> Are we the cartographers who compose the map in our own cultural image – as white-collar professionals, many of us white or privileged? Are we members of a dominant group that profits from the map's reproductive function – as official representatives of an educational system, and in the case of many institutions of higher learning, the State? (Selfe and Selfe 77)

As implied, educators need to recognize the struggles they *do not* face, but are rather encountered by their students, especially those from traditionally marginalized and oppressed groups. To do so, they must put themselves into the shoes of their students by working directly with them and experience the tacit rules these students follow to socially organize themselves in the online learning environment. Following those observations, educators can then identify and tackle these sensible challenges in their course planning and integration of MOOC or similar tools in their classroom.

A second implication for educators is to invest in MOOC design efforts. The field of computers and composition has grown steadily since Selfe and Selfe's call for more educators in the humanities to contribute to technology design in their canonical work published in 1994. Professional and scholarly organizations such as the Alliance for Computers and Writing, special interest groups and committees in the National Council of Teachers of English (like the Instruction Technology Committee), and Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Committee on Computers (7Cs) are

formed to influence the design of software through research and collective actions,

over formal and informal strategies. New faculty members and even graduate students,

especially those who are interested in digital rhetoric and technology studies, should seek

to associate themselves with these avenues for involvement in software design. By

charging groups teachers who are reflective of their technology use to "take on the task of

making systematic suggestions" to software designers, programmers, and manufacturers,

through reviews of application design, publication of critical examination of design

implications in the classroom, and identification of outstanding software design (Selfe

and Selfe 80). Through collaborations between educators and designers, as well as those

who specialize in content development, both academics and practitioners can contribute

to increasing critical awareness of technology issues, which serves to extend and

transform current MOOC design and interfaces.

Implications for Students

Through the Foucauldian power analysis, we are informed that users are active

agents rather than passive external parts of a designed system. Viewing the users not just

as oppressed but as political agents who constantly negotiate for power helps us to gain a

nuanced perspective that might otherwise be lost. As the primary users, students play a

vital role in influencing the future development of MOOCs. Not only are they the main

consumers of current available MOOCs, they are also the best critics of such platform;

their feedback to the instructional and programming team are extremely invaluable, as

they add firsthand voices to the review of software design. Students, therefore, should

provide constant constructive criticisms to their MOOC providers to point out areas they

find helpful in their learning experience as well as those that need improvements or

modifications. Yet, in order to address the interested nature of MOOC interfaces as flawed maps of reality, students should work with computers and composition studies specialists to remap the interface as "texts" (Selfe and Selfe 80). Through reflection of cultural, linguistics, and ideological perspectives in MOOCs, students can come up with ideas for redesigning the MOOC platform to include desirable features that are currently unavailable in existing interfaces, and suggest ways for these interfaces to be more inclusive of students from marginalized cultures.

By turning to their teachers or MOOC-using professionals as key resource people in the effort of reconceiving the maps of MOOCs, students can conceptualize an alternative map of MOOCs through prose descriptions, as suggested by Selfe and Selfe, or illustration methods that include both digital and analogue means. Students can work with their teachers to brainstorm possible layouts for primary MOOC interface – creating menus and navigation bars, organizing site maps, imagining icons and other graphics, and integrating other web tools they hope to incorporate into a re-conceptualized user interface that serves as the optimal learning space for them. Computers and composition specialists can then mock up a working version of the redesigned interface for actual beta analysis or usability testing.

This kind of student-centered exercise is crucial in programming the next version of MOOCs, but it is often overlooked or undermined by computer specialists. Besides, Selfe and Selfe add, this project may also help students to see that "interests concealed in one map, one representation of a culture, can be revealed and foregrounded in a another" (81). By participating in the re-conception exercise, students can learn to make rhetorical

decisions and see the effects their choices have on other users, through the lens of

power, culture, and ideology.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

Summary

    The main objectives of this thesis project are to problematize the kinds of borders

established through interested maps of the MOOC platform and to draw attention to ways

users, educators, and software manufacturers (designers, programmers, and vendors) can

re-conceptualize existing MOOC features and interfaces in order to be more

representative of the interests of traditionally marginalized and oppressed users. Through

my observations and personal reflections on MOOC usage, and through a critical

examination of current MOOC platform, I explored MOOCs as an electronic contact

zone for learning and exchanges, where power relations among the participants are often

asymmetrical. Grounded in Selfe and Selfe's politics (and rhetoric) of the interface and

Foucauldian power analytics, the general theoretical literature on this subject have

provided a condensed review on the historical development of the Open Educational

Resources movement, coupled with connectivism and connected learning theory, which

help establish MOOCs as a new pedagogical approach and business model in the

connected age.

Concerned with the study of the experience from the perspective the researcher, the research method employed in this study – phenomenology – sought to emphasize my lived experience as a MOOC user, as a graduate student, and as a writing instructor, in identifying challenges and illuminating insights related to the MOOC phenomenon. Through a qualitative analysis of my personal narrative data, I have abstracted some essential themes that were summarized within the respective sections classified in Selfe and Selfe's landmark article:

- The platform as maps of class privilege and capitalism

- The platform as maps of rationalism and logocentrism

- The platform as maps of discursive privilege

In addition, the Foucauldian power analysis is applied as a way to investigate and reflect on the power negotiation within the MOOC platform.

Based on the observations and analyses presented in this study, several implications for software designers, educators, and students were illuminated. By talking about the ways in which interested borders are established along ideological axes that represent dominant tendencies in our culture, this study also discussed various means for students and teachers to establish new discursive domains within MOOC interfaces – through collaborative exercises and engaging in scholar-professional conversations on design implications.

Toward a Critical Reading of MOOCs

Focusing on the linguistic and socio-cultural contexts in MOOCs, the scale of this study is narrowed to examining problematic aspects in MOOC interfaces from a critical perspective. Since effort of eliminating oppression, according to Henry Giroux, is "an

going contest within every aspect of daily life," (155) the remapping of MOOCs as an

educational space should be a continual project for computers and composition studies

specialists. An area for future research could be the analysis of how MOOC developers

are aggregating big data from their users to create rules within the interface that enforce

norms in learning and teaching. Another possible topic for study would be the

pedagogical affordances of MOOCs through the lens of discourse and practice.

Although MOOCs are marked as the so-called next big thing, the road to

democratizing education remains long and challenging. Dennis Yang, founder of Udemy,

says, "many things have to change in order to meet the challenges" of making education

free and available to the public ("Are We MOOC'd Out"). In her reflection, Karen Head

– who headed the instructional team of FYC 2.0 MOOC – implies that MOOC

programmers and instructors need to work hand-in-hand to build a more effective

platform for the future:

> For now, the technology is lacking for courses in subject areas like writing, which have such strong qualitative evaluation requirements. Too often we found our pedagogical choices hindered by the course-delivery platform we were required to use, when we felt that the platform should serve the pedagogical requirements. Too many decisions about platform functionality seem to be arbitrary, or made by people who may be excellent programmers but, I suspect, have never been teachers. (Head, "Lesson Learned")

Notwithstanding these apprehensions, many academics are optimistic about the

contributions MOOCs can make to the traditional classroom. To echo Selfe and Selfe, it

is prudent to acknowledge the complications and contradictions inherent in understanding

MOOCs as complicated spaces for learning (82). As cited by these authors, Winograd

and Flores point out, we must take on the responsibility of continuing to "work towards

unconcealment … and let our awareness guide our actions in creating and applying

technology" (179). Thus, future studies should consider the issues with diversity and globalization of education through MOOCs, with regards to access issues (how students from all parts of the world access the course site and the cost involved in the process), representation (how different cultures and values are embodied in the interface), and community engagement and socialization in online learning environments (how students learn by interacting with other users of the course).

Admittedly, I, for one, am not sure if MOOCs are here to stay. This does not mean there is no value in studying current MOOCs as new research and learning spaces. As English teachers, we need to be aware of every new composition spaces and the promises and perils they pose. We are on the cusp of adapting to new pedagogical approaches and tools as they present themselves to us in the age of technological advancement. As composition specialists, we have no greater calling: to help our students be critical thinkers and successful writers. Hopefully, this thesis has helped its readers think more critically about the rhetoric of (new) technology, and to consider pursuing a MOOC for personal enrichment.

WORKS CITED

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Weekly Journals

Week 1

Monday, May 27, 2013

After some long waiting, First-Year Composition 2.0 MOOC has finally begun! I received an email notification from the FYC2.0 MOOC team around 2pm on May 27 and I immediately logged onto the course site to check out the populated site and its content.

Introductions and Logistics

One of the first things I noticed on the welcome page was the Week One Announcement cum welcome message from the MOOC team. As I was reading it, I find quite a few technical terms that may be alien to students without first-year writing experience, such as: ethos, logos, pathos, and rhetorical devices. I also noticed that points are given to participation in discussion forums in this MOOC, which differs from my experience with other MOOCs on Coursera (will talk more about this concern later). The team also made it clear that peer reviews are crucial for the success of each student in this MOOC. As a final note, the team welcomed students to participate in Hangouts that will begin in Week Two. Only a select few will be chosen to participate in the Hangouts:

> *the Composition 2.0 team will contact a few students (likely those who have been particularly active in the course, through forum participation or early assignment submission) and invite those students to virtually meet up with members of the instructional team and discuss course content, questions, and concerns.*

I guess it is hard to judge for now if this is a good approach. My prior experience with MOOCs is that Hangouts are usually open to every student in the course. At this point, limiting access to Hangouts may either create competitions in the students or make them feel unimportant.

Moving on, I took a look at the Course Overview page and found the areas of focus in this course: Critical Thinking, Rhetoric, Process, and Digital Media. There was a link that brings me to the welcome video by Dr. Karen Head, the chief instructor of this course. In her message, Dr. Head highlighted that this course will be different than a traditional writing class in terms of its student enrollment. She said she expects 50,000-60,000 students to be enrolled in FYC2.0 MOOC even though the point of her video production, she was not sure of the exact number of enrollment of this course. This is why she emphasized the importance of peer review in this course. She asked students not to be concerned about their ability to grade other students' work, but to rather concentrate on contributing to the success of the large community of writers in this MOOC – since writing is a communal effort.

Besides the "Welcome to the Course" video, there was another introduction video that talked about the use of technology in this course. Dr. Head talked about the main tools required for writing essays, creating visuals, and putting together an oral presentation for this course. At this point, I have decided to put off the Week One module videos to later

(tonight) and went ahead to look at the discussion forums. To my surprise, the forums are already well populated by students from all around the world (which makes me wonder if the email announcement to the commencement of the course was sent at differ times to the students). I visited several sub-forums which titles caught my attention – "Our Writing Community – Say Hello!" and "Study Groups/Writing Groups." After spending about 20 minutes on introducing myself to the forums and reading others' introductions, I moved on to reading the course syllabus.

The course syllabus highlights the main assignments for this course: personal philosophy essay, personal philosophy visual, and personal philosophy presentation. It all seem to all build upon a personal statement that will be written by Week Three and the remediation of it for the rest of the semester.

Most of the readings for this course are taken from *Writing Commons* (www.writingcommons.org), an open source textbook for college writers, founded by Dr. Joseph Moxley at University of South Florida. Since I am a staff on the *Writing Commons* team, I hope the connections I have there would be helpful with the development of this thesis.

The grading structure is pretty self-explanatory. Like mentioned, the final grade for this course weights upon the personal philosophy and the drafts & final versions of its remediation. The syllabus, however, did not specify the grade/percentages needed to pass this course.

Week One Video Modules

First of the bat, the instructor requested the student (me) to complete three surveys. The first survey is intended to help both the instructor and the student understand the effectiveness of the student's use of composition for communication purposes. The second survey looks at the student's use of technology. What I find interesting is the information included at the end of the survey (upon completion) about common mistakes among students in their choice of technology for different communication purposes. Similarly, the third survey concentrates on the student's level of confidence in writing, designing visuals, and organizing oral presentations. At the end, again, it offers a comparison between characteristics of inexperienced communicators and seasoned communicators. All three surveys prompt the following: "Your self-analysis can be part of the information you present in a paragraph describing yourself as a communicator."

I think the surveys serve as a prompt for students to reflect on their own confidence level as a communicator, both written/visual and verbal.

Immediately following the surveys, I was asked to compose my personal benchmark statement. I was confused at first what a benchmark should mean in my personal statement but I went ahead anyway:

Question 1

Write your personal benchmark statement in the box below. Before you click "Submit," copy and paste your statement into a document and save it to your computer or to a flash drive.

My response:

> *I consider myself an effective communicator, whether it is through written languages, visual, or oral presentations. As a student of rhetoric, I am aware of the rhetorical situations in everyday events and conversations with others. Hence, I always pay attention to the intended audience, the content of the message, as well as the context the communication takes place. Nonetheless, I strive to become a better listener in every opportunity that has presented itself to me. I believe that being a communicator doesn't mean just being able to speak/convey a message well, but also able to receive information and understand them well. Therefore, I am hoping to learn more about ways to become a better communicator by working with other students in this course.*

I wished the instructor had provided more information on what the personal benchmark statement was supposed to be.

Upon submission, I got 1.00/1.00 for the mini assignment.

The rest of video 1 introduces the "rhetorical triangle" with message surrounded by ethos, logos, and pathos. Dr. Head talks about ethos (character), and says that it is the most important element in constructing an argument.

The second video module introduces pathos (connection with audience, emotions). Here is where I first encounter one of the many "check-in" moments in the video lectures, which are necessary for the successful completion of this course.

The first prompt: Imagine that you must ask a close friend if you can borrow something of value. Consider pathos and take a few moments to compose the first few sentences that will establish an effective connection with this audience and, therefore, help you achieve your goal.

My response: Dear friend. How's the summer treating you? I wish all is well in Georgia. As you know, I have been accepted into Georgia Tech for its MA program. I will be moving to Georgia in a few weeks. I wonder if you can lend me your apartments to stay for a few weeks while I look for a place to live?

And it says "Correct!" after I submitted my response. I am pretty sure that it is an automated response. What is the point of this exercise of no one is going to look at it? Does learning occur in this context?

The second prompt: Now imagine that you must ask an older relative if you can borrow something of value… (the rest of the prompt is the same as the first).

My response: Hi grandma, how are you doing? I heard from daddy that you have been gardening and helping your neighbors with their flowers... that's awesome! I wish I could spend the summer with you. But there is one thing I need your help... can you lend me that car you have not driven for months? I need it to travel to Georgia this summer. Please let me know. I miss you.

Again, the "answer" was "Correct!" and I clicked on the "Explanation" button, only to find that it asks me to continue watching the video.

The third video was about logos (structure to arguments). Another check-in moment occurred in this video with the same prompt from the second video, only that this time it asks for the student to consider logos instead of pathos.

My response for first prompt: Hi friend. I need to borrow your car because my wife is in labor and I need to go see her at the hospital right now.

My response for second prompt: Hi grandma. I need to borrow your car because dad and mom won't lend me theirs. I must go to school and I need a car to get there.

> Week One Hangout:
> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAV0f18nTG0&feature=youtu.be

Week One Overall Reflection

It seems to be that the focus of this course, at least for now, is equip students with the tools to make better arguments/produce better messages so they can be more confident in the communication process.

At this point I reviewed the aim of the course, and I was right on the confidence part… as it states:

> **Welcome to First-Year Composition 2.0**, where you will gain confidence in using written, visual, and oral communication to critique and create documents and presentations.

OK. These will be my notes so far for Week One. Cheers.

Tuesday, June 11, 2013

Due to the preparation needed for my presentation at the Computers and Writing 2013 conference, I was not able to complete the Week modules and assignments on time. I was slightly worried at first that this may affect my overall experience with taking this MOOC. However, I soon convinced myself that no one could really predict their future schedules at the time they signed up for this MOOC. There must be students out there who have also missed (will miss) a week or two (or more) modules in the MOOC. Hence, I have decided to embrace this experience and journal the consequences I have to face for missing this week's module.

I decided to catch up with Week Two's video lectures. Though in the past I have chosen to forgo those lectures, I feel that I have to complete the modules in order to get the most out of this course.

The first video module talks about brainstorming and thesis formation as part of the invention process. I find the Check-in examples in the video rather complex even though the explanations by Dr. Karen Head were understandable. I have saved the print-screens of these questions for later deliberations.

The second video refers to the rhetorical situation/triangle (audience, context, media, etc.) that was taught in Week One. It wasn't until this video that I figured the examples used in the Check-in moments were taken from the readings assigned (from *Writing Commons*) for the week. The instruction for reading the articles before watching the video modules were not delivered clearly/effectively in this course.

The third video looks like an extension for the second video, where Dr. Head utilizes the readings for the week to demonstrate how the authors have respectively identified their audience and used different rhetorical movements (ethos, logos, and pathos) to appeal to their audience. At the end of the video, viewers were reminded to submit their draft (at least 300 words) and where to submit them.

The second week's Hangout was joined by two students, who were handpicked by the instructors to participate in the conversation. I didn't finish watching the 34-minute video as the delay with the first student made it really difficult to follow the audio and the technical issue with the second student's headphone/speaker just threw me off.

As far as the assignment is concerned, I am not able to submit a late draft since the window was closed on Sunday night. And because I didn't submit a draft, I was not able to participate in the peer review for this week. I feel that this design format is not flexible for students who missed the deadline unintentionally. Comparing to traditional, in-class writing courses, the instructors would most likely still make up something for these students so they may participate in the coming week's activities. Would you shut out a

student just because they missed one activity in the prior session? I think this is where this MOOC fall short of.

Friday, June 14, 2013

Week Three, here we go! I am not sure about other MOOCers but I definitely feel the laziness kicking in at this point of the course. Due to my situation where I did not complete the personal philosophy essay, I was not able to participate in the peer review exercise this week. Even though I would like to still review other students' work, the system simply doesn't allow me to. This brings me to consider the rhetoric of and the notion of power built into the MOOC structure (Selfe and Selfe). I think it would be an interesting study to investigate the rhetoric and ideologies in the design of MOOC platforms. How are MOOC providers and users empowered and limited by the design of the MOOC (borders)?

At this point I am not as active on the discussion forums on Coursera as I did before. It is difficult to follow the conversations that are going on if you didn't pay attention to the threads that are populated by students. But at least there isn't an external site where students gather for further discussions (in the past I have had to use Facebook groups for chats). That would just be a disaster.

So, Week Three focuses on peer reviews. The video modules and readings are about learning how to provide feedback to others' writing and consider the reviews others provide to your work. The first video briefly introduces terms related to reviewing a written work, such as proofreading, editing, and reviewing. Dr. Head also used WC to give some tips to students who may not be familiar with peer reviewing.

The second video covers the grading rubric. It gives viewers a more solid idea about reviewing others' work by actually going through an essay in the video. Dr. Head reviewed an essay and provided explanations to areas where reviewers should pay attention. I find this activity helpful as it serves as a calibration process for all reviewers. However, there are certainly areas where grades are left up to the reviewer's own discretion.

The final video addresses the ways to respond to feedback that writers would receive from their peers. This is an important piece of puzzle that's usually missing from peer review facilitations. I think this video was the most helpful video of this week's modules.

The hangout video for Week Three was not posted correctly (it is linked to Week Two's Hangout video). However, I was able to locate the right video at the weekly announcement section. One thing that I realize is that the Hangout videos are too lengthy. This week's Hangout was 32 minutes long. This week, the hangout was joined by a student from Egypt. The video this week also suffers from echo issue. It makes viewing it really tough and annoying. Hence, I have only skimmed through video. The idea of Hangout/discussion with student(s) in real time is great, but the execution really needs improvement.

Note: The team (finally) posted the requirement for achieving the Statement of Accomplishment on June 14. Students may now have a better idea how to "pass" this course and how to get a statement with distinction.

Saturday, June 29, 2013

I skipped watching the video modules from last week and accumulated them for this week. However, I submitted the visual remediation personal philosophy assignment and received a score of 13.5 out of 15 from my peers. My personal experience with the peer review session was as follows:

I was required to complete a training module before I could start reviewing other peers' assignments. I had a hard time "passing" the training because I was not giving the ideal scores of each section. I been through at least 5 samples before it finally said that I didn't pass the training but still allowed me to move on to actual grading of my peers' assignments. I was amazed (not in a positive sense, I mind you) by the standard that has been set in this calibration and thought that this could be very rigid for students like me. Especially for a visual assignment, I feel that there is no "one right way" to grade any work by the student. The fact that we have to grade according to the MOOC team's standard makes me feel withdrawn and almost unfair. I do however see the intention of such standardization. I wonder if students who did not pass the training would have easily given up on the peer review exercise.

For Week 5, we were supposed to revise the visual assignment and submit the revised work for peer review again. I did only some revision to the caption and did not change a bit on the visual. I wonder if I would receive similar score… or if the work would be graded by the same reviewers (I can tell that if I receive the same work to review).

Week 4 talked about the concepts and principles of visual literacy. The first video module looks at the design choices and elements when deciding how to compose a visual rhetoric. The second video focused solely on the elements of a photograph. It covers a little bit on the idea of framing. The third video introduced the concept of typography. I feel that all three videos have very limited information on visual composition/design. I am aware that I am a visual designer, hence I may have a more critical view of visual components in any design. However, I also feel that students should not be told what *is* right for an image and what not. The beauty of any design/composition lies in the eye of the beholder. It almost always relies on the viewers to describe what they find most appealing in any visual work. Hence, I detest the fact that this module require students to *learn* what is visually appealing and what not. The typography check-in moment in video three is an example of what I meant by forcing students to learn the right choice of design. Depending on the context and purpose (plus other rhetorical situations), I believe all of the typography are suitable for the image. It is doing a disservice to the students to teach them to use one specific design element for any one situation.

Week 5 started with the analysis of advertising. Dr. Head used an ad as example to discuss the use of color, text, and composition to create different appeals to different audience. The second video talked about copyright issues and laws related to fair use and image credits/citations. The third video focused on writing captions, which often are used

to describe the image or intend to answer questions that viewers may have about the image.

Overall, Weeks 4-5 were by far my favorite modules since visual rhetoric and visual literacy coincide with my research interests. I look forward to the peer review session and hopefully I don't have to go through the "training" again. I am also looking forward to finding out if the revised work would be reviewed by the same peer reviewers.

Saturday, July 6, 2013

Last week, I found out that the peer review for revised visual assignment was graded by different student reviewers from the initial visual draft. I received 12 out of 15 (my draft got 13.5 out of 15) for the revised work. I can't tell if it was a tighter review or if it was just because the reviewers have different expectations this time. I do not think that the visual assignment went well for me overall because I was not able to present it face-to-face to justify my design choices (or at least to have a space to talk about it, such as a blog). In an online course that I took in Spring 2013, I had a similar assignment, and I was able to discuss with the professor about my choice and use the discussion board to share my challenges and lessons learned with peers in that online course. These elements are absent in this MOOC assignment.

Week Six kick-started the oral communication unit, which was the last unit in this MOOC. The first video focused on the key to preparing an oral presentation, which Dr. Head said to be the same as any preparation for communication (written and visual). Dr. Head also focused on the Dialogic model of communication and lectured on how to prepare a presentation based on the model.

The second video asked students to watch Duarte's TED Talk and use it as an example of expertly-composed argument. Students were asked to post the outline of their presentation to the discussion forum. Surprisingly, there were only 4 outlines posted in the forum, as of Saturday (which is one day before the assignment is due).

The third video talked about the introduction, conclusion, and how to use visual elements to guide the audience. Dr. Head referred to Duarte's Ted Talk again and asked students to take note of how Duarte started and concluded her talk. The video module ended with a reminder of the assignment due date.

My video submission: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWuPuEXDqZo

Saturday, July 13, 2013

The first video module brought students back into peer review mode and it continued the conversation from the last peer review module (week 5 & 6). This time, the focus was on confidence, as Dr. Head urged students to be more critical in the review of their peer's introduction and conclusion in the video. A student video ("Emma") was used as an example for review in the video.

The foci in video module two were forecasting, signposting, and transition. The same student video was used as the sample for review. Dr. Head, again, performed a verbal review on the video.

The last video module was about nonverbal cues and adding visual into the oral communication. Again, the same student video was played in full length before Dr. Head demonstrated another oral review on the visual aspects in that video.

Again, I skipped Hangout video for this week.

Experience with Peer Review on Oral Communication Assignment

This week, I had to be "trained" again before I could review any of my peer's video. There were 7 practices for me since I "didn't do well" in the first few. One of the video links was broken and another sent me to a Florida University online mail outlook system.

After the 7 "training reviews" I reviewed 4 videos. One stood out to me: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzPNFEcw_P8. The girl in the video (I assume) has put in the effort beyond my expectations for this assignment. Other videos are mostly average and one was a broken link. Supposedly, I should have posted the link to the discussion forum and see if the student who made this video could post a new link for me. However, I only learned that I could do that after I graded all the videos, and I was not willing to wait by the forum for the new link. I wonder how many students have faced the same situation.

Another interesting observation is that some students announced their withdrawal from the MOOC on the discussion forum and other MOOC students started encouraging these students to endure the challenge. Most of these withdrawal messages came in during Week 6 when the video assignment was due. Many students reported that they struggled with using technology in making the videos and so decided to not continue with the course. Those who advised these students to stayed attempted to help solve their technological challenges and gave suggestions to using other software options to make the videos.

The intensity (how busy it is) at the discussion has definitely dropped since Week 1 and by Week 6, there were only a handful of people posting in the forum.

For revised video submission, I am going to send in the same video that I have done for Week 6, since I received full points, 15 out of 15, from my peer review. (I wonder how many students would do the same as me.):
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWuPuEXDqZo

Saturday, July 20, 2013

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMnbCG8wfrQ

Peer review result: 15/15 for my revised oral communication video assignment. (I submitted the same video I used for the draft video.)

This is the final week of the course. Dr. Head in her first video module reminded us about the aim of the course, which is to develop effective communication skills. The focus of the first module was reflection. I agree with Dr. Head that reflection is an important process in any profession that is often skipped due to its "messy" nature. However, when carried out appropriately, reflection helps us to move forward by looking back at our mistakes and accomplishments. In the first video module, Dr. Head asked us to retake the three surveys that we took at the start of this course as part of the reflection process. There was another link that led to a consent form that asks student permission for their responses to be used by Dr. Head and her team for future studies. I have saved a copy of the survey form. Then, Dr. Head asked us to review our personal benchmark statement and revise it based on the elements we learned in this course that define an effective communicator.

The second video focused on the elements in the revision of the personal benchmark: **planning, time management, audience, rhetorical triangle, feedback, and transformation** (modes of communication). A check-in moment asked students to identify their progress on these six elements after completing this course. The second check-in moment was another consent release form to use these student responses for future research. Dr. Head then used "audience" as a model for students to revise their respective benchmark statements.

The Gibbs model was used in video module three to help students format their revised benchmark statements: **Description, feelings, evaluation, analysis** (looking at factors that affect changes), **conclusion**, and **action plans**. Dr. Head asked students to submit a 500-1000 words revised benchmark statements, which will not be peer-reviewed, as the final assignment for this course. Since the revised benchmark statement carries 15% for the course, and are not peer-graded, I wonder how the MOOC team would grade them.

My original Personal Benchmark Statement:

I consider myself an effective communicator, whether it is through written languages, visual, or oral presentations. As a student of rhetoric, I am aware of the rhetorical situations in everyday events and conversations with others. Hence, I always pay attention to the intended audience, the content of the message, as well as the context the communication takes place. Nonetheless, I strive to become a better listener in every opportunity that has presented itself to me. I believe that being a communicator doesn't mean just being able to speak/convey a message well, but also able to receive

information and understand them well. Therefore, I am hoping to learn more about ways to become a better communicator by working with other students in this course.

My revised Personal Benchmark Statement:

Planning - *I think I have learned a little bit about planning and organizing my writing from this course. I feel optimistic that I will become a better writer by practicing pre-writing activities such as outlining and brainstorming ideas. In this course, I have practiced these activities in most of my drafts and revised assignments. I think this will be a foundation for my future writing habits. For now on, I will be more prone to planning and organizing my work before jumping right in to actual writing/designing/delivering my work.*

Time Management – *Setting aside time to complete the assignments is one of my greatest takeaways from this course. I feel confident that I can take on another MOOC in the future. Based on my performance in this course, I can conclude that I have managed my time well, as I was able to submit all – except the first assignment, when I was away for Computers & Writing Conference – on time. I will keep up the same motivation and apply it to other endeavors in my academic career.*

Audience – *I have learned to address a specific group of audience from this MOOC: the self-starters. From my observations, most MOOC takers are early adopters who are self-motivated. To write to this group of people is different from writing to the general public or academics. I feel more confident about writing on MOOCs now and have learned how to be a part of that community. It was an interesting experience, especially when looking at the conversations in the forum. I plan to look deeper into the community-building aspect in MOOCs and analyze how MOOCs can be a learning space open to the public.*

Rhetorical Triangle – *I have had previous education about the rhetorical triangle and hence this was a refresher for me. I have learned a little about the rhetorical situation but was able to apply them into my writing for the MOOC community. I was amused by the responses I received from the peer reviewers on my assignments. Given the anonymous grading, I was not able to analyze how a person's background affects the grades he or she gives on my assignments but I have received grades on both extremes in one same assignment. I would like to look more into the implications of anonymous, un-facilitated peer reviews on MOOCs and how we can improve the learning experience for the students.*

Feedback – *I have learned to be more critical in providing feedback to others' work and to receive critiques well. I appreciate the module we had on how to make the most of others' feedback. That really helped me to look at feedbacks from a new perspective. My action plan for the future is to remain an open mind and positive outlook with peer feedback as they will be an important part of my career as a writer.*

Transformation – *I have learned a great deal about designing communication in different media. Just as this course is designed around the theme of written, visual, and*

oral communication, I have learned new ways to communicate more effectively across these media. Most of my enlightenment comes from feedback of my peers in this course. I feel more comfortable to share my ideas, especially in oral communication delivery. I will continue to strengthen my proficiency in different modes of delivery through practices in the future.

APPENDIX B

My FYC 2.0 MOOC Certificate of Completion

My FYC 2.0 MOOC Certificate of Completion

coursera

coursera.org

JULY 24, 2013

Statement of Accomplishment

JASON CHEW KIT THAM

HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY'S ONLINE OFFERING OF

First-Year Composition 2.0

First-Year Composition 2.0 helps students develop a better process and gain confidence in written, visual, and oral communication and to create and critique college-level documents and presentations.

NELSON BAKER, PH.D.
DEAN, PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION
GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

KAREN HEAD, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
THE SCHOOL OF LITERATURE, MEDIA, AND COMMUNICATION
THE GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

PLEASE NOTE: THE ONLINE OFFERING OF THIS CLASS DOES NOT REFLECT THE ENTIRE CURRICULUM OFFERED TO STUDENTS ENROLLED AT GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY. THIS STATEMENT DOES NOT AFFIRM THAT THIS STUDENT WAS ENROLLED AS A STUDENT AT GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ANY WAY. IT DOES NOT CONFER A GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GRADE; IT DOES NOT CONFER GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY CREDIT; IT DOES NOT CONFER A GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DEGREE; AND IT DOES NOT VERIFY THE IDENTITY OF THE STUDENT.

APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND
SPONSORED PROGRAMS
ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY.

Administrative Services 210
Website: stcloudstate.edu/osp   Email: osp@stcloudstate.edu
Phone: 320-308-4932

Name: Jason Tham

Address: 706 6th Avenue South Apt 105

St. Cloud, MN 56301

Email: thja0905@stcloudstate.edu

**IRB APPLICATION
DETERMINATION:
EXEMPT**

Co-Investigator:

Project Title: Power and the Platform: A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Rhetoric and Politics in Composition MOOC's (Massive Open Online Courses)

Advisor: Matthew Barton

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **EXEMPT**

We are pleased to advise you that your project has been deemed as exempt in accordance with federal regulations. The IRB has found that your research project meets the criteria for exempt status and the criteria for protection of human subjects in exempt research. Please note the following items concerning our exempt policy:

-- Principal Investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects in this project

--Exempt protocols DO NOT need to be renewed.

--Exempt protocols DO NOT require revisions. However, if changes are made to a protocol that may no longer meet the exempt criteria, a new initial application will be required.

--Adverse events (research related injuries or other harmful outcomes) must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible.

--The IRB reserves the right to review the research while it is in progress or when it is completed.

Good luck on your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs at 320-308-4932 or email lidonnay@stcloudstate.edu. Please use the SCSU IRB number listed on any of the forms submitted which relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the IRB.

For the Institutional Review Board:

Linda Donnay
IRB Administrator
Office of Sponsored Programs

For St. Cloud State University:

Patrica Hughes,
Interim Associate Provost for
Research Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSUIRB#   1081 - 1536
Type of Review:

Today's Date: 2/6/2014
EXEMPT: 2/6/2014
Expiration Date:

APPENDIX D

List of Hyperlinks

List of Hyperlinks