A malleable and holistic framework for supporting distant learners

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Outline of this presentation

- ‘Information and Literature Searching’ for the Online PhD programme at the UCL Institute of Education (Nazlin)
  - Provide context
  - Introduce the course and its components
  - Provide an evaluation of the course

- ‘Understanding Research Methods’ MOOC launched on Coursera in 2014 (Yenn)
  - The development process of the course
  - Rationale for the course design
  - Outcomes and reflections

- Conclusion (Nazlin and Yenn)
Distant Learning

- According to Miller and Honeyman (1993), distance learning provides “access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance or both”.

- Distant learners are therefore not physically present in a traditional academic setting such as a lecture theatre or classroom.

- Other terms to describe distance learning include e-learning, online learning and distributed learning. However, distance learning is the oldest and mostly commonly used term globally.

Newsam Library & Archives
Support for distant learners
Lib...everything!

**IOE LibGuides**
- LibAnswers
- YouTube demo videos
- RSS feeds
- Links to resources

**IOE LibAnswers**
- Twitter
- SMS
- Embedded in LibGuides

**IOE LibChat**
Twitter [@IOELibrary](https://twitter.com/IOELibrary) and [@NazlinBhimani](https://twitter.com/NazlinBhimani)

**Moodle**
- Standalone module e.g. Information and Literature Searching
- Embedded in an online module e.g. ‘What is education?’ core module

YouTube: [UCL IOE Library](https://www.youtube.com/user/UCLIOELibrary)
Skype: IOELibrarian
Blog: [Newsam News](http://newsamnews.ioe.ac.uk/)
Ensuring student have a choice in how they learn: through videos, step-by-step instructions, screen shots etc.
About the Online PhD

Welcome to the UCL Institute of Education, London, the world's leading centre for education and applied social science.

Number 1 for Education worldwide
2015 QS World University Rankings
Online Information & Literature Searching Course
Online PhD
The Runway

1. Moodle (VLE)
2. Content
3. Access
About the students


Gourlay, L., Oliver, M., Fransman, J., Clark, W., Hill, S., Bhimani, N., & Sakarya, B. (2013). Digital Literacies as a Postgraduate Attribute. Key findings at http://libguides.ioe.ac.uk/digital_literacies

The course is underpinned by the findings from the BL-JISC (2012) *Researchers of Tomorrow* study which looked at the user behaviour of 17,000 students at 70 HEIs in the UK.

1. Doctoral students are increasingly reliant on secondary research resources (e.g. journal articles, books), moving away from primary materials (e.g. primary archival material and large datasets).

2. Access to relevant resources is a major constraint for doctoral students’ progress. Authentication access and licence limitations to subscription-based resources, such as e-journals, are particularly problematic.

3. Open access and copyright appear to be a source of confusion for doctoral students, rather than encouraging innovation and collaborative research.

4. This generation of doctoral students operate in an environment where their research behaviour does not use the full potential of innovative technology.

5. Doctoral students are insufficiently trained or informed to be able to fully embrace the latest opportunities in the digital information environment.
YOU OVER-INTELLECTUALIZE EVERYTHING!

NO I DON'T. YOU'RE JUST TOO DUMB TO UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

SEE?!
Readings


Take off...
Week 0: Induction

Introduce yourself

Please introduce yourself to me and tell me what you are researching so that I can introduce relevant resources to you on a week-by-week basis.

Thanks,
Naizin

Task and Discussion

Provide feedback on the LibGuides and LibAnswers explaining how you found your way around the sites and which of the guides/answers you found most useful. If you can share this with your colleagues, we will all benefit. The library team are always keen for feedback on the online support offered to distant learners.
Week 1: The Centrality of the Literature Review

Task and Discussion

The readings provide a grounding for your literature review. Consider the quote below and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it giving your reasons:

According to S. Gash (2000), a literature review is, “...a systematic and thorough search of all types of published literature in order to identify as many items as possible that are relevant to a particular topic.” (see: Gash, S. (2000) Effective Literature Searching for Research, 2nd ed. Aldershot: Gower Publishing)

Please note, you will have to complete the activity by 19th October at the latest.

Task and Discussion

Fill in the 'Documenting your Search' MSWord file. Then create a concept map so that you can visually see your subject - you can use some of the freely available software which has been mentioned and/or use MS PowerPoint or MS Word. This will allow you to see how broad your research question is, the key concepts, themes, keywords, subject headings, authors, theorists etc. Share your map with your colleagues and discuss your experience of doing this exercise on the forum. Please finish this task by 19th October.
In the first run of the course I summarised the discussions for the whole group.
In both iterations of the course, I gave feedback to individual students on their concept maps so that I could suggest relevant resources that they could search to find resources for their literature review.

All the students found this exercise useful as it allowed them to see how large their topics were and also enabled them to search individual concepts separately in order to find relevant resources.
Week 2: Historical Inquiry

- Reading: Freathy, R. , Parker, S. , 2010. The need...
- Task and Discussion
- Theses and Dissertations
  - IOE LibGuide: Accessing Resources Remotely
  - Video: Accessing Databases Remotely
  - IOE LibGuide for Theses and Dissertations
  - Video on ETOS: Electronic Thesis Online Service
  - Video on Searching for Theses and Dissertation 1
  - Video: Theses and Dissertations 2
- Education Databases
  - Video: Accessing Databases Remotely
  - IOE LibGuide: Accessing Resources Remotely
  - IOE LibGuide for the A-Z of Databases
  - Video: How to search BEI (Basic)
  - Video: Thesaurus Searching on BEI
  - Presentation: How to search on ERIC
  - IOE LibGuide on DERA: Digital Education Resource...
  - Video: Searching the Web of Science
  - Task and Discussion

Task and Discussion

Discuss the reading and whether you agree with the authors. Then identify primary sources you could be consulting for your research topic. Have a look at the archive and special collections at the Newsam Library. Look for materials in other libraries including local record offices/archives. Identify data sources that may exist which you could use or re-use or use as a template to collecting your own data.

Even if you are not using historical materials, consider the reading in light of literature in your area. For a resource to be considered as a primary source, it needs to be viewed in context. See the post on Newsam News.

Now discuss your findings with your colleagues. Please finish this activity by 26th October.

An example of embedding the Library’s blog, Newsam News, into the course to alert students to yet another way in which the Library provides support to students.
Freathy & Parker (2010) highlighted the significance of historical inquiry which they viewed to be lacking in education research. For example, historical inquiry informs the researcher/reader how past education policy, theory and practice emerged, elucidates the context for change and continuity, and throws light on how present discourses grow from past socio-cultural and political contexts. Hence, the authors viewed that the large numbers of research lacking historiographical awareness, which build largely on secondary sources instead, suggested an inadequate amount of analytical work despite the abundance of synthesis and integration of research.

I am inclined to agree with the authors on the relevance and significance of historical inquiry. My research is on a framework for the development of professional identity and efficacy of the 21st century music teacher in Singapore. While historical inquiry would not be the dominant research methodology for such a study, I reckon that the historical inquiry could enrich and inform my literature review. For example, I could look into the National Archives in Singapore since the context of my research is Singapore. A quick search online brought me to potentially useful primary sources such as oral history interviews with different music teachers related to music education, which I might be able to investigate how these personalities grew their professional identity. Some of the transcripts were also available online, such as an interview with Leong Yoon Pin, one of the best-known Singapore composer and music teacher. This particular interview shed light on music teaching practices in his times, the notion of specialist music teacher, music training and teacher development in Singapore then. The Archives also hold government records which could provide glimpses of past policies (although I have some difficulties navigating through these). Past speeches and press releases are also helpful primary sources of information. I could also explore the archives and special collections at IOE library such as the ‘Comparative Education’, which could help me develop a more nuanced understanding of teacher development in different countries and different contexts, to help me make sense and situate the positions of the different authors I have read.

On the other hand, I do understand that there are challenges with documentary research, which we examined in our module ‘Research Methods’ last term. Some of these relate to issues of the quality of the documents such as authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Scott, 2014). Hence, while historical inquiry is useful, it would require skill and critical discernment.

References


In the second iteration of the course, the students were introduced to the concept of ‘peer review’ and asked to work in pairs.

Each took it in turn to summarise a discussion for the group and the each reviewed the summary.

This allowed me more time to focus on individual queries.
Week 3: Impact (Citations)

Task and Discussion

Select a reading that you have found and use the REVIEW method to evaluate the information resource. Explain to your colleagues whether the method worked and what other criteria you used to gauge its appropriateness for inclusion in your literature review. Please finish this activity by 2nd November.

Task and Discussion

Of the articles you have found so far, are you able to gauge their importance vis-à-vis scholarship in your subject area? One of the ways to measure impact is through citations, i.e. how many times an article has been published. Conduct a cited reference search on the Web of Science (after you have watched the video) and discuss your findings. Compare the number of citations on the Web of Science to those found on Google Scholar. Please finish this task by 2nd November.

Task and Discussion

Join Senate House Libraries and look at the following pages that describe the different collections. Once you get your username and password, you will be able to access the databases. Next, familiarise yourself with the resources available at Senate House Library. Access one of the databases and share with the cohort what you found and how you fared in this exercise. Please finish this task by 2nd November.

Tip! Do look at the database 'Academic Search Complete' and the Psychology Databases. Senate House Library also has a rich collection of arts and humanities databases.
Week 4: New Technologies incl. social media

Task 1: Keeping Current

Once you have got a handle on how to create alerts, try and create alerts from a
1. database search
2. citation
3. journal table of contents (either from the publisher's website or from ZETOC)
4. website
5. blog

Discuss with your colleagues your experience of setting up RSS or email alerts, explaining why you have used one instead of the other. Do you think this is a useful way to keep current with research in your area? Please discuss here and finish the task by 7th June.

Task 2: Beyond Vanity Searching

1. Vanity Search:
Search for yourself on Google, Google Images, Google Videos, Google Books, Google Maps and Google Scholar.
Do you have a digital presence? If so, are you pleased with what you saw or would you rather you were invisible?

2. Altmetrics
Impact of scholarly research is increasingly being measured by 'altmetrics'. As they are referred to, include the number of shares, likes and downloads on various social media sites. To find out how many times an academic work has been 'tweeted' on social media, download the Altmetric 8! bookmarklet from http://www.altmetric.com/bookmarklet.php and test it - the instructions are on the same site.

3. Your Digital Presence
Establish your digital presence on one or more of these sites and explain which one(s) you chose and why.
- Google Scholar
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Blog
- Mendeley/Zotero

Discuss your experience with social media focussing both on your digital identity, brand and footprint and on the potential use of social media for research on the Discussion Forum here. Please finish this task by 7th June.
Landing ...
- Feedback

**WORKLOAD**
Make future students aware of the level of workload with regards to expected hours spent per week on the completion of each task in order to complete the course successfully.

**COURSE LENGTH**
...it might be useful to space the assignments and have a longer course duration so that we can have more time to explore the resources and benefit more fully from the course.

Run the module over 6 weeks. The module is both interesting and informative and I would have appreciated more time. Material given needs time to be digested and I am still coming back to articles, videos and explanations.

**CONTENT**
I am confused and still not sure about citation searching on the Web of Science because I couldn't figure how the maps work.

I did not understand the activity about pairing up and it should have been explained in advance. Also setting up alerts was too time consuming and confusing.

**TECHNOLOGY**
Some exercise were difficult to complete, but more due to technological difficulties [problem with authenticating to Zetoc].

It took me a long time to get over the technical challenges.

**TIMING**
For the organisers not to put 3 courses on at the same time.
Feedback

CONTENT
The videos make things so much easier to understand. I found the videos really useful and well structured. The video presentation were brilliant as they showed us exactly what we have to do.

INTEREST
Every aspect of the module was interesting as I had no background knowledge on how to do research for a literature review.

TEACHING
I think the teaching and delivery of the module was excellent. It was well structured and all the information was made available. There was a huge amount of information and Nazlin was always there to answer any questions. She also made sure to reply to every post. I was impressed! The teaching was perfect and of high quality.

I was always impressed with the tutor’s “encyclopaedic knowledge”.

STRUCTURE
The structure of the module was very well done, with appropriate tasks. It was demanding but necessary in order to progress.

😊 A big thank you to the person behind the conception of the module 😊 and to Nazlin who is perfect at mediating, answering questions and giving comments.

Bravo! I am so pleased with the organisation – from the first day we knew more or less what we were going to do so I could plan my “homework” very well. THANK YOU!
Food for thought ...

- Evaluate feedback carefully
- Reconsider length of course
- Reconsider when to run the course again
- Reconsider ways to increase engagement and peer learning
- Clarify workload and expectations
- Re-look at course on Moodle
- And more…

"MEMO: In the spirit of diversity, anyone offering food for thought must also provide a vegetarian version, as well as low-carb, low-fat, and Kosher versions.”
Understanding Research Methods MOOC
Genesis?

- Multi-party collaboration
  - Course instructors (Dr J Simon Rofe and myself) from SOAS
  - Investment and project management from the ULIP
  - The platform provider (Coursera) in Silicon Valley
  - BLE team (+ video production)
  - 12 interviewees for learning resources
  - Intercollegiate advisory board
  - Associate Tutors
Genesis? (cont’d)

• Timeline
  • Call for proposals by the ULIP in Jun 2013
  • SOAS’s proposal successful in Jul 2013
  • Business case signed by both parties and a MOOC team formed in autumn 2013
  • Respective QA procedures cleared by Feb 2014
  • Registration opened in Feb 2014
  • First iteration from 2 Jun to 13 Jul 2014 (6 weeks)
  • Second iteration from 3 Nov to 14 Dec 2014
Course structure

• E-tivities (Salmon, 2002)
  • Purpose
  • Task
  • Response
  • Outcome

• Learning resources
  • ‘In conversation with…’ videos
  • Reading materials

• Talkabouts
Outcomes and impacts

• +55,000 students enrolled from all around the world in 2014
  • In line with SOAS’s dedication to more inclusive education
  • Brand enhancement (e.g. Google ranks)
  • Signature Track revenues
Outcomes and impacts (2)

• 92% rating their understanding of the subject matter after the course to be ‘good to excellent’, rising from 55%

• Participants demonstrated similar improvement in the second run, from 42% to 91%

• Also very encouraging comments:
“I cannot stress enough how much I have liked the fact that the e-tivity was driven by participants – [...] this is the best MOOC I have taken part in by some distance. This is what a MOOC should be about – not content driven with endless videos and online materials (we can find this content easily enough all over the web) but driven by the learners and their varied expertise.”
“It wasn’t what I expected at all. [...] It was quite different but what they did I really liked. I liked the fact that there was a lot of reflection on the part of experienced researchers and the fact that we could see different points of view on the same topics or questions. I found this to be quite useful personally as someone who is an emerging researcher in a tenure track position at a research university.”
Outcomes and impacts (3)

• Community of learners
  • Diverse perspectives and experiences
  • Community Mentors
  • Collaboration expanded into offline

• Requests from fellow academics globally for possible use of the course format and material
  • Various disciplines including Medicine and Biology
  • Coursera Learning Hub at Dominican University in California
Outcomes and impacts (4)

• Requests for advice on
  • Designing a MOOC or an online course in general
  • Teaching research methods and skills (e.g. AQA)

• Guardian University Awards 2015 nomination
Food for thought: assessment design

• Proved to be most challenging due to:
  • Scalability
  • Compatibility with the pedagogical orientation of the platform operator
  • Suitability to the nature of the subject

• Students encouraged to have a free-style discussion about each e-tivity task with their colleagues before submission

• Actual submissions were assessed only by whether a genuine attempt or not
Assessment, flipped

- The final grades are only part of the story about the learning that takes place
  - No statistical correlation between the levels of active engagement in the forum and the final grades
  - Although not completing the course, students actively engaged in the forum demonstrated signs of learning
What’s next

• Relaunched in on-demand format in Jul 2015
• In-Flight MOOCs (!)
Conclusions
Online courses for distant learners

Model depends on the following criteria:

• Size of the student body
• Diversity of the student body
• How blended the course is – i.e. Is there an offline element?
• Whether the course is compulsory/credit-bearing
• How ‘exclusive’/tailored the content is for a specific group of students
One size does not fit all

- Online course designs need thinking through
- Not a panacea for lack of resources
- Simple scaling up does not necessarily mean readiness for global consumption

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The need for a malleable model

Each online course is unique like a snowflake, shaped by:

- Individuality of the students
  - Preferred learning styles
  - Prior knowledge and backgrounds
  - Motivations
  - Language competency
  - IT competency
- The instructor’s pedagogical stance
- The hosting institution’s goals and agendas
- Technological affordances and limitations
The need for holistic evaluation

• In existing practice, student engagement is often measured by the frequencies of posts in forums and student learning is often assessed by the quality of one final written assignment.

• However, as seen from this comparative case, there needs to be a holistic approach through a mixed method analysis of:
  • Quantitative data such as the number of posts and clicks, time spent on different components of the course, etc.
  • Patterns of navigation and interactions
  • Qualitative data of texts and conversations
  • The amount of ‘engaged silence’
Questions?