

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH MOOCS

Nowadays, education experiences significant changes in terms of used technologies and teaching methods. An increased use of modern devices like computers, tablets, and smartphones, as well as software programs and applications for learning simplifies the process of the professional development (PD). In the past few years alone, educators have been facing changes in curriculum standards, student assessments, expectations for the uses of technology and the personalization of learning, diversity of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and teacher evaluation processes, along with decreased funding leading to larger class sizes, fewer resources, and the need to make education more productive and cost-effective.

Teacher professional development is the process of constantly strengthening professional attainment, broadening academic knowledge, enhancing the professional skills, and improving teaching ability. With the reform of learning science and the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the traditional mode of teacher professional development is confronted with challenge, and the new emerging MOOC system provides resources for 21st century professionals. MOOCs can serve as a unique professional development opportunity for professionals in higher education settings [1].

The term Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) emerged in 2008 and became supplemental educational tools in the area of professional development for educators. MOOCs are an emerging technology that has caught the attention of corporations, administrators, educators and learners alike and has compelled them to look at learning, teaching, and education through a different lens [2].

There are several **factors** that make MOOCs a perfect option for ongoing teacher PD. With it, educators can learn for *free*, getting the opportunity to collaborate with, and learn from, virtual colleagues. MOOCs provides *flexibility*, both in time and location, for those participating in it. Nowhere is this more important than for teachers' continuing training. Most teachers work long days then spend much of their time away from school to plan and grade. This makes finding time for professional development a *challenge* for most. Just like any kind of training or learning, the results don't stick in a one-shot situation. Learning needs to be reinforced over a long period of time and teachers need to have an opportunity to practice, implement, ask questions, try again, and integrate new skills and information on a schedule that works for them and allows them to remember the information. MOOCs, if designed with this strategy in mind, have enormous potential to meet this need. The on-demand, 24/7 nature of MOOCs also provides teachers with a medium for discussing and sharing their PD challenges and triumphs with others in the field. Finally, the *availability* of the free content and resources found in some MOOCs could provide teachers with additional resources for teaching in their classrooms [3].

The format for a MOOC varies depending on the course. You can usually **expect a combination of learning formats**: video lectures; group discussions; online/offline reading; discussion forums; quizzes; homework; peer review.

Currently, the most popular and well-regarded MOOC providers are:

- Coursera: free online courses from universities;
- Udacity: master new industry skills through a series of online courses and projects via the ‘nano’ degree;
- Edx: free online courses from universities;
- NovoEd: social learning and professional development online;
- Canvas Network: free online courses and classes from universities;
- Open Education by Blackboard: platform used by many unis to deliver MOOCs;
- Iversity: free online courses from inspiring professors. Top European Universities;
- OpenLearn: free learning by the Open University (OU);
- FutureLearn: free online courses from universities and cultural institutions.

Educators can use FutureLearn (www.futurelearn.com) [4] as a professional development tool. If a teacher is looking for ways to improve their professional practice or increase their knowledge in the subjects they teach or areas they would like to explore, FutureLearn can be a resourceful tool.

It offers a diverse selection of courses from leading universities (University of Bristol, Cardiff University, University of Glasgow, University of Leeds, University of York) and cultural institutions from around the world (British Council, the British Library, the British Museum, and the National Film and Television School). FutureLearn also works with a range of internationally renowned organisations – from professional bodies such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), to businesses like the BBC and Marks & Spencer, to the UK Government.

These courses are delivered one step at a time, and are accessible on mobile, tablet and desktop, so it is easy to fit learning around your life. They offer the opportunity to discuss what you’re learning with others as you go, helping you make fresh discoveries and form new ideas.

Many activities include a quiz, a moment to pause and check how well you’ve understood the key points from the previous video or article before moving on. The quizzes are not scored, you get an unlimited number of tries at each question and moderators give you feedback and hints on each go.

At key moments in the course, you’ll find tests. They work in much the same way as quizzes but tests are scored and are limited to three tries. These count towards your overall mark and are designed to test your knowledge. You can get three points if you get a question right first time, two on your second attempt and one on your third.

Many of the courses also offer you the opportunity to do assignments and get feedback from other learners on the course. Each assignment will come with clear instructions about how to write or create your assignment, as well as give constructive feedback to others. It's a great opportunity to put what you've learnt into practice and get tips on how to improve.

There are some steps that can make your professional development with **FutureLearn** productive and interesting.

Pick a course. Browse the [course list](#) to find something that you'd like to learn about. There are the courses in a diverse range of subjects and they are always added more. For PD you can choose some courses from the [Teaching & Studying](#) Category, for example "[Understanding Language: Learning and Teaching](#)", "[Developing Your Research Project](#)", "[Assessment for Learning in STEM Teaching](#)", "[Exploring the World of English Language Teaching](#)", "[Learning Online: Learning and Collaborating](#)", "[Teaching for Success: the Classroom and the World](#)" and many others. Courses vary in length. Most are six to ten weeks long but some of them are shorter (two and three week courses).

Introduce yourself. It is a good idea to fill in your profile page so that other learners can find out more about you.

Start the course. Once the course begins, a link will appear on [Your courses](#) dashboard. This will take you to the course 'To do' list, which will show you what to do next.

To do. FutureLearn courses are divided into weeks. These contain various activities that you should aim to complete within the week, each one built from a sequence of straightforward steps, to help you learn. Each week is given a descriptive name, so you always know what's expected, and you can even navigate between them, to see what's coming up, or catch up from the beginning if you're late starting.

Videos, audio and articles. You can learn by watching videos, listening to audio and reading articles. Many of these steps are followed by short quizzes to help you check that you have understood.

Comments in the margin. Every article, video or piece of audio has a space to allow learners to comment and ask questions. This appears in the margin on large screens or is revealed below on small screens. You can discuss topics with each other and educators will offer guidance and answer questions. Press the comment button to join the conversation.

Mark as complete. The progress button at the top of the page tells you how much of the course you have completed. Every time you click on '[Mark as complete](#)' at the bottom of a step, your progress % will increase. This updates your '[To do](#)' list, but leaving the switch off does not prevent you from moving on to the next step. If you're not sure that you properly understood something, you can leave it and come back to it later.

Discussion. Every so often, you'll come across a discussion step, where you'll be given a topic to talk over with fellow learners. Talking about ideas is a really great way to learn and consolidate information.

Activity. If you want to find out what everyone is talking about right now, go to the course activity page to see what questions you can help answer and which topics are under debate.

Replies. Once you start commenting, you'll probably get replies from other learners. You'll see these on the replies page. You'll also get email notifications, so that you never miss a reply.

Follow. Press the 'Follow' button on the profile page of the person who is making interesting points and asking great questions. You can also filter the discussions to include the people you're most interested in. If someone follows you and you follow back, you can learn together. It is a good idea to **Follow the educators**. You can find their comments more easily, and this is the easiest way to keep up to date with what other people are asking about.

Reflect on what you've learned. At the end of each week you'll find a reflection step with questions to help you consider what has been useful or interesting and what you would like to change in your teaching.

Educators should keep up with emerging trends in the educational field through professional development. FutureLearn can help educators learn some fundamentals about online learning and apply what they learned to the courses they will teach. FutureLearn can provide opportunities to educators and give them access to knowledge, skills, and learning opportunities. FutureLearn can promote professional growth while providing new knowledge or skills for employers. Although FutureLearn introduce pedagogy differently than in-person training, educators must remain motivated to learn so they can share their knowledge with their students. FutureLearn, like many other online learning tools, have their constraints and affordances.

REFERENCES

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