Article

Creating a Community Rather Than a Course—Possibilities and Dilemmas in an MOOC

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Abstract: In this article, a massive open online course (MOOC) made by and for Swedish teachers will be presented and discussed in order to determine what possibilities and dilemmas are involved when creating and participating in an MOOC that is meant to be a community rather than a course. By analysing interviews of the organisers as well as blog posts and surveys answered by participants, the conclusions that can be drawn point to the ambiguity of the boundary created between participating in a community and in a course. The way one is expected to participate in the MOOC differs from how one is usually expected to participate in professional development courses. The social aspects of a community become the focus for the participants in the MOOC rather than the content that it is addressing. The skeletal structure of the MOOC inhibits the participation of those who are unaccustomed to the digital environment where it takes place. Furthermore, the division of labour between participants and organisers is affected by the notion of course and therefore becomes ambiguous and creates tensions for both organisers and participants.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to investigate the possibilities as well as the difficulties in creating, and participating in, a massive open online course (MOOC) that aims to be a community rather than a course. The MOOC that has been studied, *Digitala Skollyftet* (in English The Digital School Boost), addressed three cornerstones: digital competence, sharing-is-caring and school development. The MOOC was created to be a space for the professional development of teachers and attempted to contribute to improving digital competence amongst teachers in Swedish schools. Unlike most MOOCs, *Digitala Skollyftet* was not connected to any educational institution. It was designed as a cMOOC, where the "c" defines that the MOOC is based on connectivist and networking concepts and with a focus on community building and interaction [1]. To emphasise the network aspects, the organisers of *Digitala Skollyftet* tended to refer to the MOOC as a massive open online community, rather than a course. The analyses of the empirical data will explore the dilemmas faced by both the organisers of the MOOC and the participants, in relation to creating and engaging in a community rather than a course.

The following research questions will be addressed:

- What are the possibilities and dilemmas involved when creating an MOOC as a community, rather than a course?

- What are the possibilities and dilemmas involved in participating in an MOOC that is designed as a community?

1.1. Background

The MOOC, *Digitala Skollyftet* (in English: The Digital School Boost), took place during the autumn of 2013. Four teachers, who have previously been involved in another initiative called *Skollyftet* in Sweden, set up the site and planned for the MOOC. *Skollyftet* originates in an attempt to counteract negative media coverage of Swedish schools by emphasising positive aspects and changes in the Swedish educational system. A number of Swedish teachers actively post information and discuss issues on a daily basis on social media such as Twitter. This phenomenon has been termed The Online Community of Educators (in Swedish: *Det Utvidgade Kollegiet*).

Digitala Skollyftet was constructed with a connectivist pedagogical model in mind [2] and had a skeletal structure in order to scaffold the involvement of participants. There was a general concern amongst the organisers that the participants may need a structure to get involved, and therefore a starting point in November 2013 was established and weekly hangouts were arranged, where different issues were discussed and "experts" were invited to take part in the discussions. Furthermore, *Digitala Skollyftet* aimed to facilitate user engagement and offered a number of online tasks in which the participants could actively engage by interacting with others, contributing with posts in digital environments and social media such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as setting up their own blog. However, participation in a cMOOC like this does not necessarily mean actively interacting and posting, but could also consist of following the flow of events connected to the MOOC and receiving information through others, by reading what they post and following discussions in different forums [3]. Around 1500 teachers enrolled in *Digitala Skollyftet*, but to enroll in an MOOC, particularly a cMOOC, does not necessarily mean committing to anything. To enroll is free and open and there are no predefined expectations for participation [4]. Since the MOOC is open, participation is also possible whether enrolled or not. As McAuley, Stewart, Siemens and Cormier put it "participation in an MOOC is emergent, fragmented, diffuse, and diverse" [4] (p. 6). Therefore, the number of people that enroll has little or no relation to the number of active participants.

Previous analysis of the data collected in *Digitala Skollyftet* reveals that while some participants were active in posting on different forums and visibly engaging in the MOOC, others were not as visibly active [5]. However, these participants appear to participate through following different digital forums and sharing what they learn there with their colleagues at the school where they work [5,6]. Interactions between participants in *Digitala Skollyftet* mainly take place in Facebook and Twitter [7]. Blog posts are not commented on to any great extent and critical or questioning comments are rare. Instead, in the interaction that does take place in the blogs, the participants reason with each other and exchange experiences and practical advice. Most comments consist of short positive feedback on the blog post and also include aspects aimed at building, strengthening and developing the participants' digital network [7].

1.2. Professional Development of Teachers

Setting up *Digitala Skollyftet* was an attempt to contribute to raising the digital competence amongst teachers in Swedish schools. Another of the three cornerstones that the MOOC attempted to address was school development which indicates that the aim of the MOOC was to both improve the participants' digital skills and affect the local environments of the schools where the participants work. In recent surveys, Swedish teachers state that they require further professional development on how to pedagogically use the digital devices that are becoming increasingly common in Swedish classrooms [8]. Simultaneously, questionnaires connected to the evaluation of one-to-one-projects, where all students are equipped with a digital device, reveal that teachers, in general, state that they have learned their digital skills on their own initiative and in their spare time [9]. Professional development arranged by institutions of higher education are regarded as having played a peripheral

role in their professional development related to the use of digital tools in connection to their profession. This raises the question of what kind of professional development that is needed in order to increase teachers' digital competence.

Several arguments have been raised as to why changes are needed in how professional development for teachers is organised and conceptualised. Darling-Hammond [10] suggests that a bureaucratic view of teaching regards improvements in education as a question of teachers following the right procedures "rather than the development of teachers' capacities to make complex judgements based on deep understanding of students and subjects" [10] (p. 4). The impact that professional development has had on improving teaching practices has according to Lock [11], been influenced by factors such as using a transmission model from experts to teachers, and failing to address differences in schools. Furthermore, professional development for teachers is often categorized as one-size-fits all workshops and just-in-case training and has therefore not been context-specific nor provided opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practices [11]. In order to develop a new image of professional development for teachers built on the notion of partaking in a learning community, there is a need for teachers to actively engage in their own learning process and to be willing to rethink their practice. Listening to, and learning from others, as well as learning from mistakes made along the way, are other important aspects in learning communities [11].

Network technologies may transform the insular work environment often experienced by teachers in the past [11] and may therefore facilitate new possibilities for teachers. Networks can be regarded as an image that portrays contemporary society [12] where technological advancements facilitate environments that afford both synchronous and asynchronous communication with many people. In networked communities, teachers may work in online collaborations where they can share resources and experiences as well as reflect on practice together with colleagues, regardless of their location [11]. However, obstacles have been identified when these online communities for professional development have not been very successful. These objects include the readiness of teachers as well as school culture and the quality of the professional development communities [11] In order to work in online environment teachers need to be self-motivated learners with some technological skills and self-confidence. Educational structures, where factors such as shortage of time and competing priorities come into play, may constrain participation in the online community [11].

1.3. Organisation of Education—Courses and Communities

The notion of "courses as seeds" is put forward by dePaula, Fischer and Ostwald [13] as a metaphor for changing how education is organised. It is argued that the traditional model is inappropriate when dealing with open-ended and multidisciplinary problems that are common today in society. Similar to a cMOOC, the course-as-seeds-model challenges traditional notions of courses since it is based on self-directed learning and active collaboration rather than on a notion of a course as a finished product. In the model, learning is regarded as ongoing and evolutionary [13].

In traditional courses, technology is regarded as a way to access learning materials, but in this model, the role of technology is instead to aid in the creation of communities of learners and sustaining these [13]. Innovative technologies support the collaborations and these collaborative technologies also contribute to the creation of an artefact where discussions can be captured and serve as a starting point for future learners. Another central idea is that it is not desirable to determine the outcome of the course. Plans made at the start are hence seen as resources for interpreting unanticipated things that happen during the course. That things do not go according to plan is seen as an asset that provides opportunities for learning [13]. When attempting to implement the course-as-seeds-model in a university course, dePaula, Fischer and Otswald [13] came to the conclusion that the main challenge was the cultural change needed in participants. This kind of change involves that both students and teachers critically reflect and try to change behavior, goals, values and attitudes toward education.

1.4. Theoretical Frame

Since *Digitala Skollyftet* is a new phenomenon, the participants simultaneously create and learn what partaking in it means. This is by Engeström & Sannino [14] called extensive learning and is a concept used within Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). In CHAT, activities are conceptualised as activity systems containing different components that relate to and affect each other. In the third generation of activity theory, the basic model of an activity system has been expanded to include at least two interacting activity systems [15]. When several activity systems are involved, the object of the activities becomes potentially shared and can then be regarded as a boundary object. *Digitala Skollyftet* can be regarded as an emerging activity system which relates to more established activity systems for professional learning for teachers, such as courses. The components at the systemic level (rules, community and division of labour) are under construction in the emerging activity system of the MOOC. In a professional development course there are usually rules that govern what should be achieved in the course, such as assessment and grading criteria. The division of labour usually determines what teachers do and what students are expected to do. Since these components are under construction and negotiated in the MOOC, the activity system differs from what most participants and the organisers are used to. When components in an activity system change, this will affect the other components. In contrast to the neat triangles that often depict activity systems, these systems are characterized by tensions and contradictions [16] (p. 72). Contradictions are central in CHAT and may cause disturbances, but they are also considered to be the driving force of change and development. Inner or primary contradictions reside in the components of an activity system, while secondary contradictions arise between components [16]. CHAT can be regarded as a framework for understanding transformations, since by studying contradictions caused by changes in or between the components of the activity system, insights may be gained into how and why transformations occur, as well as what they involve [17].

When the participants engage in the MOOC and when the organisers create it, they are creating something which is new to them. In expansive learning, the learners are "involved in constructing and implementing a radically new, wider and more complex object and concept of their activity" [14] (p. 2). The object of the activity system is unknown, even though both organisers and participants may have a notion of what the outcome of the activity should or could be. When trying to understand and act in the activity system, the participants may relate to their previous experience of partaking in courses and in so doing a boundary is created which may connect or divide the related activity systems.

In a review of the literature on boundary crossing and boundary objects, Akkerman and Bakker [18] define boundary as "a sociocultural difference leading to discontinuity in action or interaction" [18] (p. 133). However, as the activity systems involved are relevant to each other in certain ways, the boundary indicates continuity and sameness simultaneously. As the boundary belongs to both one world and another, descriptions of people and objects at the boundaries show signs of ambiguity [18] (p. 141). The boundary can be regarded as "in-between", since it can be perceived as belonging to neither one world nor the other. Therefore, boundaries connect as well as divide the activity systems involved. People and objects at the boundary act as bridges between the related worlds, but at the same time represent the division between them. Akkerman and Bakker [18] conclude that it is because of their ambiguous nature that boundaries have become a phenomenon that is investigated in relation to education. The ambiguity of boundaries creates a need to negotiate meanings as the ambiguity may invoke uncertainty in how to relate to boundaries.

2. Materials and Methods

The empirical data collected from the MOOC includes three surveys answered by participants, interviews with participants and organisers and collection of posts in blogs and on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The excerpts presented in this article are taken from interviews conducted with the organisers of the MOOC, from answers to the third survey answered by participants and from blog posts written by the participants.

The blog posts that are analysed in this article are taken from 39 blogs which belong to participants who answered the three surveys that were sent out as part of the research initiative. All in all, 66 persons answered all three surveys and the excerpts from survey three are taken from the answers given by these 66 persons. A first survey was sent out to all those who had enrolled in *Digitala Skollyftet*. This survey mainly asked for basic information of the participants, such as if they were teachers and which subject they taught and at what level, but also about links to their blogs and twitter identity. A total of 438 persons answered this initial survey and more than 80% of them agreed to participate in further investigations. The background information showed that the participants represented all levels of the school system. The number of female participants greatly outnumbered the number of male participants. A second survey, with in-depth questions regarding the participants' use of digital technology and social media within their profession and in their spare time, was sent out in the beginning of January 2014. This was a rather extensive survey that took some time to complete. A third survey was sent out in March 2014. This survey was shorter and the questions regarded the participants' experiences of the MOOC.

Out of the 66 persons who answered all three surveys, 42 of them gave a link to their blog. Since three of these links did not go to a blog, these three have been discarded and blog posts have been collected from 39 blogs. From the blogs a total number of 174 blog posts were collected as well as 85 comments and 48 replies from the author of the blog post (Table 1).

Table 1. Compilation of data collection from blogs.

	Blog Posts	**Comments**	**Replies**
Number of unique participants who posted/received comments/replied on comments.	39	23	15
Total number of collected post/comments/replies	174	85	48

Altogether 174 blog posts from the 39 blogs are analysed. Blog posts were collected which contained words or hashtags (#) that indicated that the blog posts were addressed to the participants in the MOOC, such as *#digiskol* and *Digitala Skollyftet*. Hashtags (#) are a type of labelling used in social media to make it easier to find information concerning a specific theme or subject. Searches for a hashtag will present all present all information that have been tagged with it. Blog posts that were tagged with or categorized as *#digiskol* or *digitala Skollyftet* were regarded as part of *#digiskol* and therefore collected. Furthermore, posts containing the terms "utvidgat kollegi*" OR #digiskol OR "digitala Skollyftet" OR digiskol OR (utvidgat AND kollegi*) OR "Digitala Skollyftet" OR "Digitala Skollyftet" were collected. By adding an asterisk (*) to a word in a search, all forms of that word will be included in the search. The collected blog posts were posted between November 2013 and March 2014. The authors from blog posts have been anonymized here, and each person will in the excerpts be represented by a six-digit number generated by the computer program where the data was collected and stored.

The interviews (Table 2) were done online and were recorded so that they could be watched and listened to several times. Apart from the group interviews, one individual interview with each of the four organisers was also done online and recorded. Though no excerpts are presented from these individual interviews, additional information about each organiser has been provided in these interviews. The interviews lasted between 1 and 2 h. In total, six group interviews and four individual interviews were conducted. They were conducted between October 2013 and March 2014. The organisers will in the excerpts be called organiser A, B, C and D.

Table 2. Overview of interviews; dates, participants, times and abbreviations used in excerpts.

Date	Interview with	Time	Abbreviations in Excerpts
16 October 2013	Group interview with organiser A, B & D	1 h 54 min (recorded in two parts)	G1:1, G1:2
23 October 2013	Group interview with all organisers	2 h 33 min (recorded in four parts)	G2:1–G2:4
14 November 2013	Group interview with organiser A, B & D	1 h 9 min (recorded in two parts)	G3:1, G3:2
5 December 2013	Group interview with organiser A, B & D	1 h 30 min	G4
15 January 2014	Group interview with organiser B, C & D	1 h 5 min (recorded in three parts)	G5:1–G5:3
9 March 2014	Group interview with all organisers	1 h 25 min	G6

The reason why excerpts are taken both from one of the surveys and from blog posts is that the participants that were not very active in the MOOC still answered the survey. In their answers they express why they have not participated in *Digitala Skollyftet*. By presenting excerpts from these different kinds of data, it is possible to address different kinds of participation and the reasons behind them.

2.1. Methods

The interviews and have been transcribed using Inqscribe. When analysing the material, interaction analysis was utilised. Jordan and Henderson [19] describe interaction analysis as "an interdisciplinary method for the empirical investigation of the interaction of human beings with each other and with objects in their environment" [19] (p. 39). Interaction analysis aims to ground the analysis in the empirical material, and thereby avoid ungrounded speculations of what people may think. Interaction analysis derives from traditions such as ethnography and conversation analysis and is often used to analyse video-recorded data. The interviews were recorded meetings on the internet and, as such, can be compared to video-recorded data of interaction since the recordings reveal how participants interact with each other throughout the meeting. Data from the interviews represent a dialogue where the participants interact with each other, but since it is a virtual meeting they also simultaneously interact with the technology and have to relate to possibilities and shortcomings of this kind of virtual interaction. The blog posts and the answers to the survey are not dialogic in the same way since they are not part of an on-going dialogue where the other participants are known. However, in dialogism, as conceptualised by Linell [20], utterances are regarded as part of on-going conversations since every utterance is addressed to somebody and are also selective responses to contextual conditions which include the utterances of others. When uttering something, speakers, or writers, anticipate a potential response and this influences the utterances and how they are phrased [20] (p. 167).

The answers to the survey are, in one sense, more of a dialogue since they answer questions and the receiver of the answers is known to the writer. When writing in a blog, you may regard what you write as a reply to what someone else has written but that may not be known to all readers. The audience of a blog post is also less clear to the writer. However, since these blog posts are written within the framework of the MOOC, the writers may address other participants in the MOOC and what they write is also influenced by the contextual conditions of the MOOC.

In the analysis of the blog posts and the answers in the survey, they have been read several times in order to reveal discernible themes that the participants write about. A primary criterion when selecting excerpts has been that the excerpts attend to the aspects in focus in this particular article and to the research questions asked. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study's findings, the empirical material has continually been examined in a collective process where the selection and interpretation of excerpts have been discussed with other researchers [19] (p. 43).

The excerpts have been chosen since they adhere to the area of interest in this article and therefore it is not claimed that they represent the complete material collected from the MOOC. Neither are the excerpts examples of what is often mentioned in the complete material. A limitation of the study could be that the qualitative analyses that have been undertaken regard a limited amount of the complete dataset. A reason for restricting the amount of data is that the aim of the study is to deepen our understanding of certain issues rather than giving a complete, or statistical, picture of the MOOC. Due to the difference in material in the complete data set (interviews, surveys, social media updates and so on) productive comparisons that relate to the complete dataset have not been made.

3. Results

In this section, excerpts will be presented, first from the interviews with the organisers, and then from the blog posts written by the participants and the answers given by them in the survey. However, a bigger picture of the results will first be given in order to map out the overall findings. The excerpts will then serve to give a more detailed account of the main findings.

When it comes to the organisers, the possibilities and dilemmas that they talk about mainly concern the structure of the MOOC. As organisers they see the opportunity to influence the impact that the MOOC will have on individuals, but also on the schools where these individuals work. The dilemmas they face mainly concern how to organise the MOOC and to what extent a structure will be beneficial for the participants. The organisers take slightly different standpoints in relation to this issue, and arrive at a compromise where a skeletal structure is developed since they think that this will enable participants who are not used to the MOOC environment to partake. In relation to the structure, the organisers also find themselves in a dilemma since their intention is to create a community rather than a course, and therefore they want to avoid features in the MOOC that make it resemble a course.

A dilemma that the organisers address once the MOOC is up and running is their own participation in the MOOC. They had not anticipated being such central figures in the MOOC once it was started. Since their role was not clearly defined, the dilemma concerns to what extent they can or should act as teachers in relation to the participants. Though reluctant to take on this role, the organisers find that they are assigned this role by some participants since they need the guidance that is usually provided by teachers. The organisers themselves are not convinced that they can provide this guidance since they do not consider themselves knowledgeable as to what participating in the MOOC involves. Instead they consider themselves, as well as the participants of the MOOC, to be involved in expansive learning where they simultaneously create, learn and participate what it means to participate in the MOOC.

The participants in the MOOC mainly talk about possibilities and dilemmas of participating in the MOOC by comparing the emerging community of the MOOC with the community of colleagues at their workplace. The focus is on what characterised the participants in the different communities rather than on the activities they engage in or their relation to their local workplace and the teaching of students. The MOOC is regarded as an opportunity to come into contact with like-minded others and this is regarded as positive and invigorating. The dilemmas are mainly expressed in relation to the organisation of the MOOC and to what extent it facilitates participation. The openness and extensiveness of the MOOC becomes an obstacle for some participants and they therefore create smaller networks where they feel comfortable to engage in conversation and discussions. The structure of the MOOC was too elusive for some, and consequently they did not participate in the MOOC. The lack of guidance was also addressed by these potential participants.

While the organisers envisioned the opportunities of the MOOC in relation to addressing a knowledge gap, the participants mainly envision opportunities in relation to finding like-minded colleagues to share experiences with. How the emerging community of the MOOC relates to the development of practice at local schools is not clear and since the participants appear to focus on the differences between the online community and the community at their workplace, potential relationships between the two are not explored to any great extent.

3.1. Organisers

In the interviews with the organisers, they reflect on their overall goal with organising the MOOC.

Excerpt A

Organiser B	The real profits from teacher networking, which is what we are building, are to articulate a knowledge gap together. I have been longing for that since I started as a teacher, that there would be room for that. If that is the only outcome then I am very satisfied.
Organiser D	That is the highest goal.
Organiser A	That more people find the Online Community of Educators and that we may reach the staff room, that it is talked about to a greater extent. (G3:2, 28.12 min)

They here express the wish to form a community of networking teachers. Being part of the MOOC is sometimes associated with being part of the Online Community of Educators, so much so that these two emerging communities appear to be intertwined. Furthermore, they state that the ultimate goal is to define a knowledge gap together. By stating this, the organisers express a wish for the participants in the MOOC to define what it needs to be about. They, as organisers, do not determine the content of the MOOC; rather, one of their goals is that the content will be defined by the community it creates and they see themselves as participants of that community. They also relate to the Online Community of Educators as a community which they want to extend and which they take as a point of reference for the community they attempt to create. Another wish is that the knowledge gap, determined by the community of the MOOC and that is talked about in the MOOC, influence what is talked about more generally at local schools.

The organisers relate what they are attempting to do in the MOOC to the experience of regular courses that most teachers have attended.

Excerpt B

Organiser B	I think that most of the ones who will ask questions will not relate to the MOOC but to the experience they already have of other ways of learning. Most of them have not participated in an MOOC, I think (G2:1, 46:23 min)

By stating that "most of the ones who will ask questions" will relate to their experience of courses, the organisers appear to anticipate that questions will be raised if participants regard the MOOC as a course. What is said in excerpt B may also relate to the division of labour in courses and that the organisers are aware of that they may be expected to act as teachers by the participants who relate to the MOOC as a course.

The organisers simultaneously express the need for a structure and doubts about having one. They express that the participants may need a structure, but at the same time, they appear to be reluctant to give directions for the participants of what to do in the MOOC or how to participate. As they express in excerpt A, they want the participants to define the content of the MOOC and defining a structure is regarded as counterproductive to such a communal definition. The organisers prepare for and organise a skeletal structure of the course involving weekly hangouts with "experts".

Later on in this interview the organisers ambiguous thoughts concerning structure and their reluctance to give directions is talked about as providing security in what is considered to be new and innovative.

Excerpt C

Organiser C	I agree that we may direct people with our texts absolutely but there is also (. . .) this is so new to many that I don't think we understand how far ahead we are conceptually, how challenging these ideas are for many. I think we have

to deliver security in return. We do that for our own sake, for everyone's sake, so that we can get learning in return. We need to deliver some kind of framework that people can relate to so that they understand this flow (G2:1, 51.20 min) . . .

Organiser D   What I call tasks is a way to help the ones who do not understand what to do at all. How do I reach people so that they know who I am, maybe I need a Twitter account, is it enough with a blog? A resource could be how you get a Twitter account, how you create a simple blog. (G2:1, 54.08 min)

In excerpt C the organisers discuss the structure they create and the reasons why it is needed. They here express a concern to scaffold the participants so that they can partake in the MOOC. The structure is regarded as resources needed in order to be able to participate, rather than a structure that determines the content of the MOOC or the participants' goals with their participation.

The strain of trying to participate in the MOOC and also have the time to guide other participants and give feedback is revealed in the way the organisers talk about the MOOC in an interview when they are in the middle of it. They have had difficulties in finding time for meetings in the group and since the division of labour was not clear from the outset, they all express a sense of not knowing what is going on and acting *ad hoc* at the last minute.

Excerpt D

Organiser B   We have become more of front figures in *Digitala Skollyftet* than we had expected. We had imagined that we would act more and be less visible, or at least I had thought that.

Organiser D   I agree.

Organiser B   Be in the background and then allow for many others to step forward. We thought there would be more of a rush.

Organiser A   I really thought that more people would want to be involved in the live hangout. (G:4, 11.23 min)

Once the MOOC gets started, the role given to the organisers in the MOOC is different from what they had anticipated. That many participants regard the organisers as "teachers" becomes clear since the organisers are not able to participate like any other participant. Instead, the division of labour in the MOOC resembles that between teachers and students in courses since the organisers are regarded as central in the activities taking place. The weekly arranged hangouts are an example of an activity where the organisers expected other participants to be more active in taking part by determining what subjects should be discussed and getting involved in the discussions. Instead, it is largely left to the organisers to be the driving charge of the weekly hangouts, both when it comes to the content and the discussions.

The organisers reflect on their own learning within the MOOC and what they see as their goal with the MOOC.

Excerpt E

Organiser B   We learned a lot about how to create an MOOC, that is our big journey in this, how you create a massive online learning situation. It is really hard and you have to think about a lot. I don't feel prestigious and I am working on not feeling responsible for the participants, because this is done very much idealistically and we know it can be perceived as fuzzy, so what you are battling with all the time is to find some structure or something that resembles something familiar, but that is hard (G3:2. 16.18 min).

In excerpt E, the organisers express the difficulties of expansive learning [14]. The organisers are involved in a balancing act where they on the one hand want to facilitate the participation in the

MOOC, on the other hand they are also learning what it means to participate in the MOOC. Since partaking in the MOOC is new to everyone, there is no set outcome. While being in the middle of their own learning process, they also have to relate to the participants in the MOOC and how they view the organisation of the MOOC. Furthermore, the organisers are involved in another balancing act where they, on the one hand, want to create something innovative and different, yet on the other hand they feel the need to relate to something familiar to most participants in order for them to engage in the MOOC.

In the interviews conducted after the MOOC had finished, the organisers reflect on their own involvement in the MOOC as well as the skeletal structure that was provided.

Excerpt F

Organiser B　I think we had too many platforms, if we had had Google as a base that would have been really good, but since there was little activity compared to Facebook and Twitter then I think it was too complicated for people to find it. And all participants did not have a Google account in the beginning. (G:6, 12.16 min).

In excerpt F, the organisers focus on the organisation of the MOOC, as in the platforms that were used. While they see the difficulty in using several platforms, they are also aware of that having several platforms facilitated the involvement of more participants. How the different platforms were used is also discussed and the use of Facebook and the creation of Facebook groups are considered to be both an asset and something that divided the community. The reason why the organisers consider Facebook groups to be problematic is that some participants created closed groups and this counteracted the openness of the MOOC. They also consider the Facebook groups as a way to withdraw from the larger community instead of openly sharing within it.

3.2. Participants

In the blog posts, the participants describe the emerging community as containing a number of individuals who share their knowledge willingly and who learn from each other.

Excerpt G

After looking around at the blogs of the participants in *Digitala Skollyftet,* I am struck by the creativity and the examples of conscious usage of digital tools in teaching that I discover. Imagine the knowledge and experience that we have together and how we share it happily amongst us! This you could call collegial school development on a large scale! (116157)

Although the content of the MOOC is touched upon, the emphasis is on what characterises those involved in the MOOC. Rather than defining a knowledge gap, as the organisers wished for, the participant appears to be concerned with defining who the participants are.

Many participants state that they are inspired by others. Some also describe how they discovered the Online Community of Educators and how invigorated they felt by it, since they got in contact with other teachers who were interested in discussing pedagogical issues, developing their teaching and exploring new digital tools as well as social media.

Excerpt H

Now I have been reading a lot of goals . . . and commented on some blogs also. What strikes me is that many people have the same goals and that several wish to extend their circle of colleagues. Many appear to feel alone at their schools—maybe that is why *Digitala Skollyftet* engages so many? You find likeminded people here and you can discuss your thoughts with educators who want to develop themselves and their teaching. We probably won't find too many tired and disillusioned teachers here—which is a pity, because here they might be able to find their strength! (114115)

Both in excerpt G and H, the participants appear to be preoccupied with defining the characteristics of the teachers who participate in the MOOC. Those who engage in the MOOC are depicted as having a common interest in developing themselves and their teaching. A number of bloggers state that they have found like-minded people in cyberspace and that it has been positive for their own development and for their teaching. In excerpt H, the blogger defines participants in *Digitala Skollyftet* by relating to what they are not, *i.e.*, tired and disillusioned teachers. However, in doing this, the blogger also compares the emerging community to local contexts, if somewhat implicitly. Furthermore, the blogger attributes certain characteristics to teachers who do not participate in the emerging community and suggests that partaking in the MOOC would have a positive impact on them.

Whereas many write about the positive aspects of being a large network community, some also state that they see this as a problem. Though having many virtual colleagues, they felt alone and found it difficult to find people to cooperate with. To counteract this, some participants created Facebook groups. In these smaller groups they found it easier to exchange experiences, give each other feedback and to expand their thoughts since they got to know the other members of the group. The creation of a group within the larger online community can be regarded as an establishment of a boundary zone within which these participants were able to form a shared object [21]. However, the organisers found the establishment of Facebook groups to be somewhat problematic since some of them were closed groups (see above, Section 3.1).

In the third survey, the participants who wrote that they have not engaged in the MOOC as much as they had planned procide in their answers some of the reasons for their limited participation. For most of them it comes down to lack of time, or changes in their work or private lives. There are, however, several participants who state that they did not participate in the MOOC since they did not understand what to do.

Excerpt I

I never became a part of it. It was too unclear to me how to work. I did not have the tools that were needed, either (115127).

Excerpt J

I have not felt that I was allowed to participate. I have probably missed the purpose altogether. … A big disadvantage is the lack of communication. I do not feel that I have taken part in professional development. I feel like I have only answered surveys (111108).

For these two participants, their limited participation was due to not having the right tools as well as not grasping what participating in the MOOC entailed. The structure of the MOOC was not sufficient for them to understand what they needed to do in order to participate and the attempts to be a community where newcomers were assisted in what to do appear not to have reached these participants. This point to the necessity of having some prior knowledge in order to grasp what was expected of them in the MOOC. The participant who says that he or she only answered surveys may have expected information of what to do in the shape of e-mails but the only thing that was sent out via e-mail was the link to the surveys. If you do not know where to look for information on the website or in social media, finding the gateway to participation becomes difficult.

4. Discussion

The findings in this section will be related to the strategic components in the activity system: rules, community and division of labour. However, since these components are intertwined it is not possible to make a clear-cut division of the three and therefore their relation to each other will also be taken into consideration. The organisation and structure of the MOOC are here considered as rules since they establish how to engage in the MOOC. Formal rules, such as curricula or assessment, are absent in *Digitala Skollyftet*.

4.1. Rules

The skeletal structure of the MOOC made it difficult to reach all possible participants and therefore some did not receive the guidance needed for them to be able to participate. That the MOOC was organised based on connectivist principles appears to have made it more difficult for participants who are less experienced in communicating online and in social media to join due to the lack of a recognizable structure. Similarly, to the novices participating in the MOOCs that Kop [6] investigated, the distributed nature of the MOOC environment as well as the high number of resources may have been both confusing and overwhelming to novice participants. According to Kop [6], the MOOC environment is challenging for novice participants since there are no educators to guide them, to challenge them and help them aggregate information or understanding how representation could be made in different media. The "seeds" that the organisers are attempting to sow spring from ideas about autonomy, openness and connectedness [2]. However, the openness and autonomy, in the sense that learner can chose where, when, what, how, with whom and what to learn, creates an environment where some participants find it difficult to know what is expected of them. Furthermore, the skeletal structure makes it difficult for participants to understand where to find support when they need it. The gateway to participation therefore remains closed, or invisible, to some participants. That the organisers, contrary to the "seed" they intended to sow, in some cases tried to take on the role of the teacher shows that they were aware of these difficulties. Their actions were an attempt to facilitate the involvement of novices but at the same time these actions may have been counterproductive to their intention of building a community.

4.2. Community

When the participants reflect on their participation in the MOOC, they emphasise its relation to other communities. In so doing, it is mainly the activity systems of the participants' workplace, and their local colleagues, that they relate to. By doing this they also illuminate how the activity systems of the MOOC and of their workplace are related to each other. However, since the comparisons between the local school environment and the MOOC environment mainly accentuate the differences between the two, what divides the different activity systems is emphasised, rather than what connects them. These comparisons, to a large extent, focus on what characterises the participants in the MOOC, rather than on the content of the MOOC. The division formulated thereby relates to the individuals in the different environments. That the community of the MOOC is defined by the characteristics of the individuals could be a way of defining what it means to be involved in this community and how it is different from being involved in the community of the local school. However, by emphasising the characteristics of the members of the community, the content of the MOOC becomes less visible. This can also be regarded as a difference between a course and a community where the focus in a course is on content; the focus in a community is rather on social relationships.

4.3. Division of Labour

Both organisers and participants are acting within a boundary where they are uncertain of the outcome of the activity and how the different activity systems involved relate to each other. The ambiguity of the boundary [18] is, in particular, related to changes in the component division of labour. In the MOOC, the organisers' intentions are that the participants should guide each other and use each other as resources. They therefore consciously try to avoid setting out rules of what to do and learn in the MOOC. However, some participants treat the MOOC as a course where they expect to learn certain things since they are used to participaing in courses where their choice of where, when, how, with whom, and what to learn are restricted and where teachers facilitate their activities. Similarly, the organisers tend to act as teachers, since they regard this as a way to scaffold and support participation in the MOOC. The organisers therefore encourage the participants to partake by giving positive feedback but also guide them in how to find out what to do and how to display

their participation. Consequently, the organisers both act and try not to act as teachers in the MOOC. They attempt to change the division of labour traditionally associated with courses, where the teacher is the more knowledgeable peer, but they still feel the need to step in and act as teachers in order to help the participants, particularly those who are not accustomed to the digital environment where the MOOC takes place.

5. Conclusions

The question of whether the MOOC is a course or a community is closely connected both to the design of the MOOC and to how participants perceive it and engage in it. As the organisers point out, setting up *Digitala Skollyftet* is a learning experience for them as well. Both they and the participants are attempting to simultaneously enact and learn a new form of activity that is not yet there and they can therefore be regarded as engaging in expansive learning [14]. The difficulties in creating activities that are new are displayed in the dilemmas faced by organisers and participants in *Digitala Skollyftet*. The new activity system is influenced by activities systems that are known to the participants and which resemble the new activity system.

What the organisers are attempting to create resembles what dePaula, Fischer and Ostwald [13] call a courses-as-seeds model. However, the course-as-seed model focuses on the change in what a course is; as well as changing what a course is, the MOOC also challenged the participants to find new ways of collaborating and displaying their own involvement. To simultaneously enact and learn in such a space was challenging for both participants and organisers.

Boundaries are ambiguous in nature, which creates a need to negotiate the similarities and the differences between the activity systems involved. *Digitala Skollyftet* appears to be lacking an arena for these negotiations. Since there is no common website where participants can ask questions or discuss issues, they are largely left to find and develop this on their own and though some may find such space it does not become a prominent feature of the MOOC. Because of this, it becomes difficult to establish a common notion of what involvement in the MOOC means, both for the organisers and the participants. Instead, organisers and participants tend to act as teachers and students even though this reinforces the notion of a course.

As pointed out by dePaula, Fischer and Otswold [13], the main challenge when attempting to design and implement a course-as-seed-model is the cultural change that both teachers and students needs to go through. The organisers of *Digitala Skollyftet* are aware of these cultural changes but appear to think of them as challenges for the participants, rather than for themselves. However, considering that the organisers fall into a pattern of responding to others, the organisers are challenged as well. In the interviews, the organisers appear to critically reflect and attempt to change their goals and attitudes towards education. However, when they encounter the participants' queries, their behaviour relies on their previous experience. Even though they critically reflect on this afterwards, they are not able to enact the cultural change in the moment.

Technology is used in the MOOC to capture discussions but also to create artefacts that could be used as a starting point for future MOOCs. The organisers express that they did not reach their ultimate goal of creating a community, but they see *Digitala Skollyftet* as a first step, or a seed. *Digitala Skollyftet* may become a valuable reference if someone attempts to create a similar environment in the future. Then the seed of a community sown by the organisers and participant of *Digitala Skollyftet* could develop and grow. Since the organisers express a wish to formulate a communal knowledge gap in the MOOC, the question arises of how to facilitate the development of content in a community. Focusing on the content of the MOOC and how the knowledge shared and created there may be disseminated to the activity system of the local schools could be a way to achieve this, and at the same time it could be a way to bridge the differences between the activity systems involved. This would highlight how the two activity systems may learn from and affect each other.

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