Accessing CPD via a MOOC aka Library Advocacy Unshushed

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I had often thought that a MOOC would be a good way of accessing continuing professional development, so when I came across Library Advocacy Unshushed on the edX platform (www.edx.org), I thought that it was worth exploring.

So, what is a MOOC? It is a **M**assive Open Online Course that runs for several weeks (seven in this case) and is available via various platforms such as edX, Udacity, or Coursera to anybody around the world as long as they have online access. There are no entry requirements beyond being able to register yourself on edX, although it is expected that the course will attract like-minded people. MOOCs have been around for a while and tend to cover science, maths, and programming concepts and are beginning to cover history and literature amongst other subjects, although there is some thought that the trend for MOOCs is in decline[1].

This particular MOOC on library advocacy was developed by Wendy Newman (Senior Fellow) and her team in the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto with support from various guest lecturers. Once registered on the course students were encouraged to pin their locations on a googlemap and it would appear that the highest concentration of students came from the United States of America

(including Juneau in Alaska!). Yet, the map clearly showed that students came from many places including Lebanon, Tanzania, the UAE, Malaysia, Australia and much of Europe. Given the geographical spread of the students, both Facebook and Twitter (@LA101x or #LA101x) was used to alert students to information as well as an almost weekly email from the Unshushed team.

While the course is quite appropriate for today's librarian, it was made very clear though that advocacy is NOT promotion, and neither is it protest, although both have their places in our skills tool box. For your information, library advocacy is all about building relationships with people that can support the library. It is also about aligning library values with organisational values so that staff can advocate appropriately, i.e. it is not worth trying to advocate to directors if they cannot see the point of the library and how it can best impact upon their business – this is why relationships need to be developed in the first place so that advocacy can be used to best effect. Which, to my mind, was the whole point of Library Advocacy Unshushed – get the relationships in place and build upon them to achieve effective advocacy – not a short term project by any means.

The training was mostly delivered via pre-recorded video lectures from Wendy supported with references to key papers covering the subjects of 'values and community', 'strategy and communications', and 'influence and relationships'. The course also included guest lectures from such as Barbara Band (formerly CILIP president) and Sarah Thomas (currently Vice President at Harvard Library and previously Director of the Bodleian Library); unfortunately most of the guest lectures created for the MOOC are only available to course attendees. I felt that the quality of the course was high with correspondingly well qualified guests,

which made for a very interesting course except that the inability to ask questions of the guests, as you might do at a 'live' lecture, was quite frustrating. Incidentally, I was very pleased to see that the video lectures had a rolling transcript alongside which was particularly helpful to me as I am deaf, but could also be useful to those that don't want to turn on the sound!

Students were required to show their development by answering quizzes and submitting assignments of around 200 words that could be seen by fellow students and commented on. We were encouraged to discuss such issues as the economic, political, or technological factors affecting library competitiveness; or whether social media has a place within advocacy or not.   The assignments often had a deadline which helped with the flow of the course as it is too easy to drift on courses like this because the particular teaching method means that there are no lectures to 'attend'! That said, the way in which the course was provided meant that the teaching was made available to the students in weekly blocks, i.e. all seven weeks of the course are not available at the beginning of the course which means that you can pace yourself instead of trying to get it all done in the first week.

The final assignment was a 500-600 word reflective piece examining what we had learnt from this MOOC and how we were going to apply this knowledge within our communities. The assignment was peer assessed by at least three other students once the deadline had passed. Peer assessment was quite straightforward as we were given a set of criteria by which to assess our fellow students and the method itself was a very simple one to follow with radio buttons to select for "unsatisfactory, satisfactory, or excellent" and space to enter comments if we so wished. Reading the assignments by other students showed

me the breadth of learning absorbed from the MOOC and how people intended to use advocacy in their role.

As a method for accessing education/training I would certainly recommend it although the learning is very much self-directed and the more you put in to it the more you get out of it. Each MOOC platform has its own benefits and drawbacks, but with edX I felt that I had to work hard at creating discussions with fellow students. Perhaps students more familiar with edX would find it easier to chat with other students, but I found that people would post their own pieces of information (usually in relation to an assignment) but then very little discussion was actually generated. In fact, I made a point of setting up a discussion with the title "talk to me!!" to try and encourage students to talk to each other rather than simply posting their assignments online in order to meet study requirements and I think that I was quite successful as we had 15 students talking to each other.

I would, however, say that the Library Advocacy Unshushed MOOC had a strong focus on public or academic libraries, but that does not mean that the librarian working in the more specialist library such as a health care library cannot learn from it. Particularly as I feel that the challenges that advocates face are universal and the principles can be applied no matter where you work, especially if we are able to align our strategies with those of the parent organisation, i.e. patient care.   Indeed, one of the guest lecturers was Joanne Marshall who discussed the value of library and information services in patient care as demonstrated by a large study carried out in the United States. Joanne stated that instead of asking people how often they used the library, her team looked for changes and differences made by the library team to patient care in order to prove the value of the library, and therefore advocate for it. In

her guest lecture Joanne outlines the point that in order to achieve successful advocacy we need to discover what is really important for local decision making and address those issues within the library. (If you are interested in following up on this, Joanne Marshall's paper was published in the Journal of the American Library Association in 2013 - http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3543128/)

What was particularly evident from the course was that people respond best to stories rather than dry facts and figures. Students studying the MOOC were encouraged to share their own impactful stories and to consider how they might seek out stories that relate to their own libraries. John Szabo, City Librarian for the Los Angeles Public Library Service was one of the many guest lecturers on this MOOC and he talked with conviction about the power of transformative stories and finding out what motivates decision makers in order to advocate effectively. So if I have one thing to recommend from this is to tell you to gather your stories together in order to use them to shape your advocacy; and to encourage you to find out what motivates your decision makers and I can tell you that it's not the number of visitors to your library.

While MOOCs do not (usually) lead to a qualification, they are another way of investigating a subject and adding to your continuing professional development and do not cost a penny; all the while listening to leaders in the field. In addition to which, all the hours studied can be counted towards your CILIP revalidation. Unfortunately this particular MOOC has now finished and I do not yet know if it will run again, but if you would like to read what Wendy Newman has to say about library advocacy then do read her blog piece on the CILIP website: http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/blog/libraries-don-t-need-more-advocacy-

they-need-better-advocacy (and if you would also like to read an interesting take on the value of advocacy then the following link provides a viewpoint on how advocacy may not work in today's political climate: http://pedronicusuk.wordpress.com/2015/03/05/libraries-advocacy-and-austerity/)

1 S. Kolowich (2015) The MOOC hype fades. The Chronicle of Higher Education http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/the-mooc-fades-in-3-charts/55701 (accessed 25th March 2015)