

**Delft University of Technology** 

## Ubiquitous learning and massive communication in MOOCs Revisiting the role of teaching as a praxis

Zarghami-Hamrah, Saeid; de Vries, Marc J.

DOI 10.1080/17449642.2018.1509189

Publication date 2018 Document Version

Accepted author manuscript **Published in** Ethics and Education

#### Citation (APA)

Zarghami-Hamrah, S., & de Vries, M. J. (2018). Ubiquitous learning and massive communication in MOOCs: Revisiting the role of teaching as a praxis. *Ethics and Education*, *13*(3), 370-384. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2018.1509189

#### Important note

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable). Please check the document version above.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

Takedown policy

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights. We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# Ubiquitous Learning and Massive Communication in MOOCs: Revisiting the role of teaching as a praxis

Saeid Zarghami-Hamrah, Kharazmi University

Marc de Vries, Delft University of Technology

The present study aims to review the role of teaching as a praxis in relation to two major changes, i.e. ubiquitous learning and massive communication caused by MOOCs. We refer to Carr's theory on the nature of educational practice for evaluating the role of teaching as a praxis. With regard to the free access of learners to the educational contents in MOOCs regardless of the limitations imposed by time and place, we argue that the teacher, who has designed and used the MOOC, is faced with a problem as how to encourage the learners, who lack the experience of 'classroom' as a context to get involved in the educational activities, engage in the lessons, and demonstrate commitment to the learning process. The second change, i.e. massive communication, has resulted in a reduction of teacher's agency and loss of teaching legitimacy and hence its natural feature as a morally committed action. In addition, massive communication has affected the potential encounters between teacher and student considered as the 'Other', on the one hand, and has replaced conversation with texting, on the other hand. We highlight the significance of teacher-student conversation as an essential element for developing reflection and self-reflection capacities. Finally, we discuss the necessity for reviewing and improving MOOCs in order to increase the chances of realizing teaching as a praxis. In such conditions, the responsibility of teaching is beyond designing and implementing education technically through MOOCs.

Keywords: ubiquitous learning, massive communication, praxis, teaching

## Introduction

Online learning is considered as one of the major technological evolutions of the present era in the field of education. In line with these transformations, during the past decade a new generation of online learning, called Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), has emerged in the field of education. Porter describes MOOCs as "the latest step in the development of the disruptive online learning technology continuum" (2015, XV). MOOCs have brought about noteworthy changes in education which are caused "partly by the new opportunities they present and partly by their threats to the existing institutions, systems, and structures" (Holford et al. 2014, 569).

In this regard, Zembylas and Vrasidas point out, "online education reveals and conceals the world in many ways" (2005a, 77). This idea is inspired by Heidegger (1977) who claims that technology would conceal being. The abovementioned points suggest that the role of the teacher is one of the educational dimensions that have undergone gradual changes in the course of introducing technological advancement in education. This could raise the question that how MOOCs might transform the role of the teacher's educational practices.

In the present study, we refer to Carr's theory (1987) as a framework defining the nature of educational practices, for the purpose of analyzing and investigating the role of teaching in relation to two major changes in education brought about by MOOCs. In the first part of the study, we discuss the transformations caused by ubiquitous learning and massive communication in education. Then we examine the role of teaching while encountering such changes and the relevant challenges proposed by Wilfred Carr in his educational practice theory.

## **Teaching in MOOCs: Poiesis or praxis?**

MOOCs have been emerged and developed during the last decade (Dabbagh et al., 2016). Alraimi, Zo, and Ciganek (2015) believe that MOOCs maintain characteristic features that distinguish them from previous approaches to online education. Tu and his colleagues (2013) describe some of the unique features of MOOC and argue that: a) MOOC is 'open' in that participants do not need to be formally enrolled in a school to 'take' the MOOC and are not required to pay a fee to participate; b) the course is designed to support a 'massive' number of students; and c) the course is online in that students can access pre-developed course materials, online assessments, discussion group tools, and materials developed during the course via the Internet.

The present study seeks to address the question of how MOOCs have changed the nature of teaching and what ethical challenges the teachers face as the consequence. For providing the potential answers to these questions, first 'ubiquitous learning' <u>phenomenon</u> is explained as a general change induced by MOOCs and other forms of online education, and next 'massive communication' is discussed as one of the unique changes observed in MOOCs.

## **Teaching in MOOCs and Ubiquitous Learning**

In MOOCs, students have access to free information in a ubiquitous learning environment regardless of the time and place of study. This emergent change could decrease the significance of classes on the one hand, and the role of teaching in transferring information to students on the other hand. As a result, the mentioned dimensions would gradually become insignificant or are even excluded since the online education does not require students' presence in specific places at pre-planned times rather they could follow the learning process at their desired time or place. They could access the educational information while enjoying the comfort of home, park, beach, or any other place. In this approach, the teacher is not considered as an exclusive source of information for students but serves as one of the several and numerous sources available. Therefore, the teacher's traditional role as the holder and transmitter of the information is lost in MOOCs, as in other forms of online education. This process could be attributed to open and online access to information as the two dominant features of MOOCs. The opportunities for ubiquitous learning have transformed the manner of interaction in a learning community from face to face to online interactions. Now teachers are increasingly faced with the question concerning the potential disadvantages of reduced face to face interaction for the process of education.

In what follows, we examine the specific case of MOOCs with regard to the discussed points. MOOCs have facilitated opportunities for interaction among learning community members including synchronous communication through mediums such as forums, mass interactions, instant and peer feedback, and the dynamic and multiple sources of information (Zarghami-Hamrah, 2018). Although such facilities could play a significant role in developing a sense of involvement in students, there are two major and fundamental factors that might prevent and disrupt the process of developing this sense; first, lack of physical presence in the classroom and, second free access to lessons.

Regarding the first factor, it could be said that MOOCs defined the relationship as a form of ICT mediated communication that is not sensitive to distance, and whether communicators are in the same country or communicating across the ocean makes little difference. However, communication across the remote geographical places creates a psychological distance and could make students abstract entities.

Psychological distance is a barrier to students' mental engagement with the subjects presented through MOOCs. If the learners do not show the preparation for joining and participating in the lessons, they would not develop a sense of belonging to the lessons as the result of lack of interest. Furthermore, psychological distance could potentially create a kind of distance among the learners which prevents the students from forming a close relationship with the classmates due to mental and real distances. In other words, lack of belonging to the lessons in the physical sense, could lead to the

emergence of a kind of psychological and mental distance and it seems that there is no specific and historical context such as classrooms in which students develop attachment for and which raises their enthusiasm for learning by creating chances such as competing with other students.

On the other hand, MOOCs have provided chances for free access. However "the ease of access could be associated with lack of commitment" (Holford et al. 2014, 70). The lack of commitment is due to the infinite opportunities and lack of need for specific capacities in order to participate in the classes.

MOOCs are omnipresent so that they are easily accessible simply through an internet connection and a platform. This kind of education does not need any initial capacities or commitment and imposes no limitation for the number of learners that could apply for registration. This would impede motivation and excitement for endeavor and competition since MOOCs do not seem to create exceptional opportunities from the learners' point of view as a result of easy and unlimited access. Dreyfus (2009) argues that the physical presence in the classroom would facilitate and foster the development of a sense of commitment and responsibility in students. However, MOOCs underscore and undermine the relevant mental pressure or sense of commitment caused by responsibility as a result of the free access and the anonymity of students. In such conditions, lack of activity and responsibility by a 'student' is simply ignored. In this way, the inactive students do not experience and demonstrate commitment toward teacher or other unknown participants who have taken the same online course. This lack of commitment and responsibility would create a lack of engagement and hence weakens the sense of involvement.

The supporters and defenders claim that MOOCs have developed the free and wide access to the higher education and the number of students who pass the courses is

higher than the number of students in the traditional classes. But the low rate of students who have completed courses in MOOCs and obtained pass scores (Tseng et al. 2016) indicates a lack of adequate motivation, commitment, and involvement in these online programs.

We discussed that ubiquitous learning in MOOCs would undermine the conventional background for developing a sense of involvement by eliminating the physical reality of the classroom as a result of free access. We will now discuss how teaching could enhance motivation and a sense of involvement in students.

Carr (1998) suggests that we might refer to Aristotle's ideas about two forms of human action for understanding the nature of educational practices: poiesis and praxis. Poiesis involves the process of making something according to some fixed and known ends and by using technical reasoning. However, praxis is a "morally committed action" (175). Carr believes that although the educational practice like poiesis is goal-oriented by nature, there are differences between these two types of practice. First, the goal of educational practice is not producing an object or instrument; rather it seeks to realize a moral good. Second, the educational practice, unlike poiesis, is not a neutral instrument that would result in producing 'good'; rather the 'good' could be done with that practice. In other words, the good lies in the practice and could not be detached. Therefore, the educational practice could not be regarded as a technical expertise designed for fulfilling an external goal. As a result, we could not set predefined and fixed goals prior to getting involved in the educational practice. He states that, "the overall purpose of technical reasoning is to consider the relative effectiveness of action as a means to some known end - as, for example, when a teacher has to decide between 'phonic' and 'whole-word' approaches to the teaching of reading solely on the basis of their effectiveness in producing some specific outcome. By contrast, the overall purpose

of practical reasoning is to decide what to do when faced with competing and, perhaps, conflicting moral ideals. Practical reasoning is thus most clearly exemplified in the thoughts and actions of those faced with a moral conflict or a moral dilemma.... For example... whether it is educationally more desirable to segregate pupils on the basis of their ability or to adopt a mixed- ability approach. " (Carr 1998, 176).

Therefore, as Carr (1998) points out, practicing is never a matter of individuals accepting and implementing some rational account of what the aims of their practices should be. It is a matter of being initiated into the knowledge, understandings, and beliefs bequeathed by that tradition through which the practice has been conveyed to us in its present shape. Practical knowledge consists of organized abilities to discern, judge and perform that are deeply rooted in understanding, beliefs, values, and attitudes so that any abstracted propositional statements of these elements or of rules and principles of practice must be inadequate and only present partial expressions of what is involved.

With regard to the discussed points, teaching as one of its fundamental roles should contribute to realizing the moral good; the good which is realized during the course of teaching.

Due to the lack of real-life experience in the 'classroom', the teacher faces the challenge of motivating the learners to engage in the lessons and show commitment to the learning process. In the classroom, the teacher has the advantage of learners' physical presence although they face the challenge of attracting their attention or, in other words, encouraging their mental presence in the classroom. However, the teacher faces additional challenges in MOOCs. In the process of traditional learning, time and place are naturally connected so that the learners attend the school and classroom at the same time and place with the teacher. However, in MOOCs, there is no single time for attendance in addition to the lack of physical presence. Therefore, it might not seem

surprising that sometimes teacher and some learners are asleep while the others are engaging in the forum discussions! And some of the learners might never enter the forums and prefer to use videos or other educational materials. In fact, due to the great number of students registered no one might notice the lack of attendance by some of the learners.

In the traditional classroom the teacher normally tries to encourage the distracted students by for example asking a question so that they could re-engage in the class activities. Anyway, the characteristics such as the lack of learners' presence, the lack of simultaneous activities, and the large numbers of learners in MOOCs inhibit the teachers' supervision over the educational performance of all learners. Therefore, in MOOCs the teacher faces the challenge of encouraging the unmotivated and uncommitted learners who register in MOOCs but have no significant activity. This challenge is significant since the massive number of learners might cover the lack of motivation and commitments of some learners. In other words, the teacher might be convinced that in MOOCs a large number of learners (much larger than in the traditional classrooms) gather and participate in forums and educational practice. But the characteristic features of MOOCs could prevent the teachers from fulfilling the responsibility for encouraging and motivating the distracted learners. Therefore, from a teacher's viewpoint, MOOCs might lack the necessary conditions for enhancing learners' motivation and commitment.

## **Teaching in MOOCs and Massive Communication**

The original idea of MOOCs was proposed based on the connectivism theory of learning. In general, it could be said that connectivism theory was advanced as a reaction to two viewpoints: instructivism and constructivism. According to the former, the knowledge could be transferred from a teacher to the students, while based on the

latter, knowledge could not be transferred, rather it is constructed and produced by students while teacher acting as a facilitator during the process of knowledge construction. However, in connectivistic terms, knowledge can neither be transferred nor produced or constructed. Knowledge grows and enhances while individuals and societies develop as networks. Therefore, originally the goals of MOOCs were not mastering the content and skill acquisition, but they were focused on conversation and social construction of knowledge in the free environment of the Web. In the same vein, Zhang, Skryabin, and Song explain that "the conceptualization of online learning environments as MOOCs by Siemens and Downes, in fact, arose out of their realization of the role of this kind of connective knowledge building" (2016, 271). Although resources are provided, exploration is more important than any particular content. The instructor encourages the participants to find their own pathways through the material. These types of MOOCs were later called cMOOCs (Tu et al. 2013).

In 2011, another type of MOOCs, called xMOOCs, were developed for responding to the conditional requirements such as the economic conditions and the increasing number of applicants, and as Lane explains, content acquisition is more important in these classes than either networking or task completion (Tu et al. 2013). Thus, the original idea underlying connectivism became more evident in cMOOCs, although xMOOCs, have also been designed on the basis of connectivism and, as Knox claims, "massive participation" (2014, 173).

In this design, the teacher-student relationship pattern is replaced by the 'learners' network', or in other words 'many to many' communication pattern. Therefore, massive interaction is defined as one of the major characteristics of MOOCs. Kalantzis and Cope (2012) mention the active construction of knowledge and the collaborative intelligence as the achievements of such a pattern interaction in e-learning. MOOCs create chances for massive communication through multiple and dynamic interaction tools including text, slides, videos, animations, and particularly questions and answers shared in the forums.

In this approach, students participate in forums where they could pose questions and receive answers from the other students. Tu and his colleagues (2013) believe that this form of learning is active by nature since it necessitates the active engagement of students. Consequently, MOOCs can provide a 'many to many' communication so students can usually communicate with each other, i.e. peer-to-peer learning, or with the teacher.

These achievements have been seemingly obtained on the basis of two fundamental transformations in the role of teacher. First, replacing the 'teacher-student' communication pattern in the classroom with the 'learners' network' communication pattern in the cyberspace, and second, replacing the conversation pattern with the texting pattern.

Establishing the context for the 'learners' network' communication is a typical example of what Biesta (2016, 5) calls 'learnification'. He states that this theory "...has repositioned the teacher from the heart of the educational process to the sideline in order to facilitate the learning of his or her 'learners'" (2012, 38).

We believe that a more extremist form of learnification has occurred in MOOCs; since, as mentioned earlier, according to the connectivism theory learning is not the process of constructing knowledge by learners. Rather, learning is considered as the end product of the interactions among learners within the learning network. Therefore a great part of facilitating responsibility is reduced for the teacher and is handed over to the learning network. This is evident in MOOCs as well as in processes such as peer-topeer exchange and forum discussions. Here, the question is "what are the ethical challenges that the learnification phenomenon poses for a teacher?" It seems that disclaiming the responsibility for teaching in MOOCs is the ethical challenge teachers face.

In fact, the teacher manages the learning process in MOOCs while she is equipped with management techniques and ICT. In other words, she does not play the role of teacher but as the educational technician who manages the learning process and the learners' network. As Biesta argues, teaching involves judging about the three major goals of education: "qualification (roughly the domain of knowledge and skills); socialisation (the educational encounter with cultures and traditions); and subjectification (education's orientation towards children and students as subjects of action and responsibility, not objects of intervention and influence)" (2012, 39).

Carr (1998) believes that in teaching as an educational practice the major issue is the desired goals and the methods adopted for pursuing them. Consequently, the teacher's mission involves judging and approaching the goals. As Biesta highlights, such a judgment is not merely a technical judgment about the way of teaching, but it includes a normative judgment or, in other words, judging about the 'why' of teaching. In agreement with Carr, Biesta writes: "Such judgments, to use Aristotle's distinction, are not about teaching as poiesis, that is, as a process of production for which we need capacity for judgment called 'techne', but about teaching as praxis, that is, a process orientated towards the human good, for which we need a capacity for judgment called 'phronesis' or practical wisdom" (2012, 45).

However, the reduction of education to learnification in MOOCs and the elimination of the interaction between the teacher and the students at a large scale limits the teacher's role to a technician and learning process manager; thus she would not get the opportunity to judge educational goals. In such a situation, as Biesta (2012) explains, the teacher is reduced to one of the several sources of learning but she cannot teach since this involves the formation and transformation of the learners. In this way, teaching confronted with the replacement of the teacher-student interaction with the peer-to-peer interaction loses the legitimacy and the natural features including "morally committed action" (Carr 1998, 175).

As Tu and his colleagues (2013) suggest that MOOCs are designed and developed on the basis of two ideas, i.e. do-it-yourself labs and peer-to-peer exchange. Furthermore, Knox (2016) adds that learners depend on the network for learning while taking responsibility for their own learning. The point to be mentioned here is that there is no room for teacher and her/his teaching in the learning network and they play the same role as other members of the learning network. Therefore, the concepts of networked learning and autonomous learning formulate the underlying principles of MOOCs.

This might explain the reason why MOOCs highlight student-student interaction and student-context interaction via self-organized online study groups and that studentteacher interaction is very limited due to the large numbers of enrolls. Teacher's limited interactions with the learners would lead to a reduction in their individual relationships with learners which raises another challenge in itself. To clarify this point, we need to explain the significance and necessity of personal interaction between teacher and students. Some thinkers and researchers have underlined the significance of personal teacher-student interaction as one of the critical factors for teaching and warned that eliminating this form of communication creates serious challenges for e-learning or MOOCs. For example, Holford et al. (2014) have criticized MOOCs for moving toward depersonalizing education and admitted that such transformations are not compatible with the true nature and sense of education. Inspired by the ideas of Levinas, Zembylas

and Vrasidas (2005b) believe that listening to students is one of the main ethical missions of the teacher. This involves an active type of listening in which students are regarded "not in terms of sameness but in the sense of absolute otherness" (76). From this point of view, students are not considered abstract and uniform citizens, but as unique others. Therefore, Zembylas and Vrasidas (2005a) mention homogenization as one of the major moral challenges that online education encounters due to establishing symbolic communication, uniform language, and disregarding individual differences. Therefore, they believe that this sense of responsibility "is a key part of ethically responsive online pedagogies" (69). Evaluating teacher's virtual communication with the learners, they add that "... the focus, then, should not be on knowing the Other but on working toward a radical openness in communication and an attending to the(unknowable) particularity of the Other that lies beyond the words written in an e-mail message or shared during an Internet chat session... Educators as well as learners, especially in the fluid and continually changing online environment, should give up their position as 'knowers' and enter into an ethical relation that welcomes the Other and does not reduce him or her to sameness" (72). They recommend inter-face interactions in the ethically responsive online pedagogies due to lack of face-to-face interactions and define this condition as an atmosphere where the teacher observes, feels, and responds to students as other. The question to be raised here is whether MOOCs can be examples of ethically responsive online pedagogies. We believe that MOOCs confront fundamental difficulties for creating an inter-face atmosphere as a result of massive communication.

Furthermore, it could be said that if creating a pedagogical relationship between teacher and students is considered as a fundamental element in teaching as a praxis, then the mass communication among students in MOOCs with the purpose of eliminating teacher-student pedagogical relationship raises major challenges for teaching. MOOCs have offered the potential for extensive and multiple communication among the students based on the connevtivism theory and for achieving the goal of effective learning. However, such extensive communication minimizes the chances for deep and individual teacher-student communication on the one hand. On the other hand, since the students are regarded as users with the capacity for effective learning, the individual differences are mainly ignored. In this situation, the teacher acts as a technical advisor who should design an interactive educational condition where students could learn by engaging as well in extensive and multiple communication. Therefore, teachers are mainly considered as technicians who create a qualitative atmosphere for learning in MOOCs. Consequently, the most central principle is creating a rich environment for interaction and learning.

MOOCs could facilitate effective learning at the expense of eliminating individual teacher-student communication and disregarding the learner as other in the process of online teaching. As a result, teaching is considered as a technical practice which could improve the conditions for effective learning. Kalantzis and Cope (2015) refer to capacities such as active knowledge production, multimodal knowledge representations, recursive feedback, collaborative intelligence, metacognitive reflection, and differentiated learning (375-376) that could be attained through the new generation of e-learning. The same outcome could be expected from MOOCs. In other words, MOOCs technically enable the teachers to enrich the educational environment so that the learners engage in producing knowledge actively. In fact, MOOCs allow the teacher to represent the knowledge through a multimodal approach.

Following MOOCs' capacity for instant and recursive assessment and feedback, the massive communication allows the teacher to develop cooperative intelligence of

the students and encourage their meta-cognitive thinking and base the learning on the individual interests of each learner. Although creating the background for developing these capacities is very significant in the teaching process, the point is that limiting the teaching practice to this goal, as Carr (1998) suggests, would reduce teaching to a technical activity. In such situations, the teacher mainly acts as a learning technician who seeks to know how learning could occur effectively. However, for contextualizing inter-face interaction, teaching could not be reduced to a merely technical action because, as Zembylas and Vrasidas (2005a) explain, since the teacher needs to base the teaching on the teacher-student ethical relationship.

Starting a pedagogical and individual relationship with each learner is defined as the main responsibility of the teacher in MOOCs; rather, she should seek to achieve the goal of designing an interactive learning environment on the basis of massive and complex communication. As a result, the lack of such pedagogical and ethical communication is evident in MOOCs which failed in attending to the other. In other words, the mass communication among students in the context of symbolic interaction and application of a unique language and limited teacher-student relationship minimizes the chances for the teacher to observe, feel, and respond to students as the other. In these online programs, a 'student' is not known or accepted as an individual with true and distinctive identity but they are merely defined as a 'name' among several other names. In other words, massive communication ruins the opportunities for the teacher to listen to each student.

Accordingly, if teachers believe that each student is a unique and different individual and interacting with students is one of the prerequisites for education, they would encounter another challenge in implementing MOOCs. MOOCs are characterized by establishing the context for massive communication; hence they

exclude to a large extent the possibility of knowing the individual learners as unique and different persons as well as relating and listening to them.

As Rhoads (2015) points out, disregarding individual differences is one of the major challenges that MOOCs confront. He writes that "distance education programs have long aimed to reach a wide range of adult learners, but criticisms have arisen concerning the lack of sensitivity and attention to a range of diversity attributes of learners" (114).

In line with the same discussion, Chernesky (2014) explains that "teaching and learning requires connection and interaction to flourish", hence "true teaching and learning must be a personal experience and could not take place in the impersonal coolness of the digital world and online pedagogies specially massive online courses" (309).

We need to raise a point here. If learning is considered as connected with teaching so that learning is expected to occur through teaching, then MOOCs would actually weaken the possibility of learning by reducing the teaching-learning relation and merely highlighting the learning process. The question to be addressed here is whether the role of MOOCs could be analyzed without reflecting on the teaching-learning relation. Freeman (1973) argues that philosophers of education almost commonly accept that although teaching needs intention, it does not necessarily imply learning hence we could imagine that teaching might not lead to the realization of learning (7). Therefore, we need to ask whether MOOCs are capable of providing the background for reinforcing teaching without considering the learning. The answer seems to be positive since if teaching is defined as an activity for a teacher with characteristics such as intention, responsibility, rationality, reasonableness, and

extensive monitoring of the training process, then we could claim that MOOCs offer some opportunities for such tasks.

With regard to the capacities mentioned in this paper, MOOCs offer the potential chances for realizing the mentioned goals more than traditional education. For instance, the teacher could monitor all the activities of the learners extensively. She could design and implement a fully accounted plan for her/his classes and employ ICT, which offers a variety of assessment tools, for assessing each learner precisely and comprehensively. Therefore, in this case, evaluating the role of MOOCs in relation to teaching depends on the meaning and expectations we define for teaching. If teaching is counted as the teacher's task in itself, then MOOCs have offered chances for fulfilling the role and ethical duty of the teacher. But if teaching is regarded as a task for the teacher where successful fulfillment would depend on special teacher-student communication, then MOOCs could weaken such potential by contextualizing, homogenization, massive communication, and impersonalizing the education process. Therefore, MOOCs would pose serious challenges in helping the teacher to realize this ethical goal.

Researchers have attempted to provide recommendations for responding to the challenges raised by homogenization, massiveness, and depersonalization. These recommendations include: Designing "SPOCs (small private online courses)" (Haber 2014, 157), "reduction of students and small and private online courses, preserving individualism and autonomy, the diminishing of content and the re-assertion of teacher authority" (Knox2014, 171), "reconceptualizing MOOCs based on multiculturalism, the diversity of contexts, multilingualism and the synthesis of local and global cultures" (Aguaded-Gomez 2013, 9) and respecting the construction of individual identity and students' privacy (Marshall 2014). By following these

recommendations and instructions, teaching practices manage to provide an effective background for realizing virtues, such as 'teacher-student' communication, as well as addressing differences and personalizing the process of education.

Massive communication decreases the role of the teacher during the interaction with students along with other qualitative changes in the manner of teacher-student interaction and the interactions among the students: interacting through texting instead of conversation. Turkle (2011) analyses a special change that our life has undergone as the result of expanding ICT. She believes that nowadays we have replaced conversation with texting. We prefer to text and email to having face-to-face conversations.

This alteration in the manner of teacher-student interaction is widely and tangibly represented in MOOCs so that in this form of online education forums are the major and most prevalent means of communication between the participants where they could share ideas by texting. Turkle discusses the fundamental role of conversation in developing and fostering the reasoning and thinking capacity of children. As she states, conversation is essential for developing reflection in the first step and self-reflection in the next. In the process of teacher-student and peer-to-peer conversations in the classroom, students develop a reflection capacity and as a result, they learn how to carry on productive internal conversations with oneself and expand their capacity for self-reflection. From this point of view, Scannell (2014) criticizes the elimination of individual and face to face interaction with the emergence of MOOCs. He holds that unpredictable teacher-student conversation in the classroom is one of the principals and critical elements of the education process for enhancing the thinking abilities. He adds that eliminating the classroom and the teacher-student conversation in the traditional sense would, in fact, endanger teaching as an identity and as a practice.

Finally, we accept that teaching practices seek to help students develop the capacity for reflection and self-reflection through typical teacher-student conversations in the classroom. From this viewpoint, by expanding massive communication via mediums such as texting MOOCs (at least in the current form) create great barriers for achieving one of the major virtues in the process of teaching, such as inhibiting the development of students' reflection and self-reflection capacity. Consequently, in the MOOCs era, one of the roles that the teacher should essentially adopt is conducting critical reviews about MOOCs for the purpose of moving the online education toward maintaining a conversation and other basic virtues in education which might be lost otherwise.

#### Conclusion

In the present study, we analyzed the role of teaching practice in MOOCs. We might raise the question of how MOOCs have changed the teacher's role and how these changes have shadowed the educational nature of the teacher's practices. This study investigates the changes in teachers' role as well as the teacher's moral mission for creating changes, such as ubiquitous learning and massive communication in MOOCs. Regarding the transformations, the teacher faces a moral challenge that their professional and technical practices in MOOCs which fulfill the goal of ubiquitous learning could result in reducing students' motivation and attachment. The second dimension, massive communication, has led to the reduction of the teacher's role in individual interaction and the substitution of conversation with texting as the means of communication. Finally, in this paper, we discussed the necessity for considering the student as the other and conversation as an essential component for acquiring the thinking power and self-reflection. The elimination of these channels of communication is considered one of the major challenges faced by MOOCs. We recommend the necessity for reviewing MOOCs in order to increase the chances of realizing teaching as a praxis. This study indicates that the role of practical reasoning is still crucial in teaching practices in MOOCs.

## Acknowledgement

The core idea of the study was shaped and expanded during the sabbatical leave of the corresponding author at TU Delft in the Netherlands. Some naïve and initial ideas of the study were presented in the INPE conference in Warsaw, 2016(Zarghami-Hamrah, de Vries, 2016) and in the 8th philosophy of education society of Iran conference in Ahvaz, 2017 (The presentation was in Persian and about lifelong learning (Zarghami-Hamrah, 2017)). The corresponding author would like to thank the participants for their kind and helpful suggestions.

#### References

- Aguaded-Gómez, J.I. 2013. "The MOOC revolution: Anewformofeducationfromthetechnologicalparadigm?"*Comunicar* 41(21): 7-8.doi:10.3916/.
- Alraimi, K. M., H. Zo, and A. P. Ciganek. 2015. "Understanding the MOOCs continuance: The role of openness and reputation."*Computers &Education80*: 28-38.doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2014.08.006.
- Biesta, G.J.J. 2012. "Giving teaching back to education: Responding to the disappearance of the teacher." *Phenomenology & Practice* 6(2): 35-49.
- Biesta, G.J.J. 2016. Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy.New York: Routledge.
- Carr, W. 1987. "What is an Educational Practice?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 21: 163–175. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9752.1987.tb00155.x.
- Carr, W. 1998. "What is educational practice?" In *Philosophy of education: major themes in the analytic tradition*, Edited by P. White, and P. Hirst, 167-183. New York: Routledge.
- Chernesky, F. 2014. "Massive possibilities? A forum on MOOCs". Academic Questions 27(3): 309-309. doi: 10.1007/s12129-014-9441-4.
- Dabbagh, N., Benson, A.D., Denham, A., Joseph, R., Al-Freih, M., Zgheib, G., Fake, H., Guo, Z. 2016. Learning technologies and globalization: Pedagogical frameworks and applications. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Dreyfus, H. 2009. On the internet: Thinking in action. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Rout ledge.
- Freeman, H. 1973. The concept of teaching. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*. 7(1): 7-38. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.1973.tb00470.x.

Harber, J. 2014. MOOCs. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

- Heidegger, M. 1977. *The question concerning technology & other essays*. Translated by W. Lovitt. New York: Harper Press.
- Holford, J., P. Jarvis, M. Milana, R. Waller, and S. Webb. 2014."The MOOC phenomenon: toward lifelong education for all?"*International Journal of LifelongEducation* 33(5): 569-572. doi: 10.1080/02601370.2014.961245.
- Knox, J. 2014. "Digital culture clash: "massive" education in the E-learning and Digital Cultures MOOC."*Distance Education*35 (2): 164-177. doi: 10.1080/01587919.2014.917704.
- Knox, J. 2016. Posthumanism and the Massive Open Online Course: Contaminating the subject of global education. New York: Routledge.
- Kalantzis, M, and Cope, B. 2012. *New learning: elements of a science of education*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kalantzis, M, and Cope, B. 2015. Learning and new media. In *The Sage handbook of learning*, edited by D. Scott, and E. Hargreaves, 373-387. London: Sage Reference.
- Marshal, S. 2014. "Exploring the ethical implications of MOOCs." *Distance education* 35(2): 250-262.doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2014.917706.
- Porter, S. 2015. *To MOOC or not to MOOC: How can online learning help to build the future of higher education?* New York: Chandos.
- Rhoads, R. A.2015. *MOOCs, high technology and higher learning*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Scannell, J. 2014. "Education: the Subjectivising Power of the Performative." *Somatechnics* 4(2): 310–323. doi: 10.3366/soma.2014.0134.
- Tseng, S.F., Y. W. Tsao, L. C. Yu, C. L. Chan, and K. R. Lai. 2016. "Who will pass? Analyzing learner behaviors in MOOCs."*Research and Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning*11(8). doi. 10.1186/s41039-016-0033-5.
- Tu, C. H., M. McIsaac, R. Doyle, H. Aydin, and A. E. Ozkul. 2013. "A cycle of online education ecstasy/agony: to MOOC or not to MOOC." Paper presented at the IEEE 63<sup>rd</sup> conference, Las Vegas, May.
- Turkle, S. 2011. Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other. New York: Basic Books.
- Zarghami-Hamrah, S. 2018. Analyzing and examining the nature of virtual relationship between teacher and students in the new generation of e-learning: The case study of MOOCs. *Foundations of Education*, 7(2): 25-36. doi:10.22067/fedu.v7i2.66937.(In Persian).
- Zarghami-Hamrah, S., and deVries, M. 2016. "Revisiting the role of teaching practice in authentic communication in MOOCs". Paper presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> conference of the International Network of Philosophers of Education, Warsaw, Agust 17-20.
- Zarghami-Hamrah, S. 2017. "MOOCs and omnipresent learning: Opportunity or challenge for lifelong learning?" In *Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> national philosophy of education society of Iran conference*, 584-590. Ahvaz: Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. (In Persian).
- Zembylas, M., and Vrasidas. C. 2005a. "Levinas and the "inter-face": the ethical challenge of online education."*Educational Theory* 55 (1): 61-78.doi:10.1111/j.1741-5446.2005.0005a.x.

- Zembylas, M., and. Vrasidas. C. 2005b. "Globalization, information and communication technologies, and the prospect of a 'global village': promises of inclusion or electronic colonization?" *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 37(1): 65-83. doi: 10.1080/0022027032000190687.
- Zhang, J., M. Skryabin. and X. Song. 2016. "Understanding the dynamics of MOOC discussion forums with simulation investigation for empirical network analysis (SIENA)." *Distance Education*37(3): 270-286. doi: 10.1080/01587919.2016.1226230.