**Learning in the Open?**

This session explores the current bubble in massive open courses (MOOCs), and the expansion of social software platforms for learning; it aims to provide some practical answers to the question: “How can we describe, design, research and reflect upon the dynamics of how people are learning in these new open networks?”

The learning landscape is changing rapidly and with it the learner experience. It is becoming less prescribed and more emergent. Learners are increasingly self-organising, creating their own learning networks. They need to be adaptive and able to work independently, as the landscape is complex and can be [full of uncertainty](http://davecormier.com/edblog/2012/01/26/embracing-uncertainty-and-the-strange-problem-of-habituation/).

Open, complex learning emerges through the dynamic interplay between the openness and structure of the learning environment, interactions within the environment, learner agency, and affordances for presence and writing. We need to find new ways to describe this. We can draw on existing learning theories, like constructivism, but we need to go wider than that, and draw on [complexity theory](http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/22/5/255.abstract), [social learning environments](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=heBZpgYUKdAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0" \l "v=onepage&q&f=false), [connectivism](http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm), and the [theory of affordances](http://eprints.port.ac.uk/9343/) to develop a more rigorous theoretical framework for these ‘new open’ learning networks.

The [framework](http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/883) maps out the relationship between prescribed and emergent learning, and has been applied in a range of examples contained in the [open wiki](http://footprints-of-emergence.wikispaces.com/) which shows how [3D ‘footprints’](http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1267) are used to map out the dynamics of learning, in examples such as MOOCs, on-campus university courses, interactive installations for Autistic Children, and Montessori preschools.

**Process**

Participants will, however, not be required to have any prior knowledge of the footprints. The footprints will be briefly explained, using one of the earliest MOOCs as an example, with reference to the [online footprints resources](http://footprints-of-emergence.wikispaces.com/Resources) in the wiki for further detail (15 minutes).

Participants will be invited to work alone or in small groups, to draw footprints of courses of their choice, and to reflect on the key issue, which is the relationship and balance between prescriptive and emergent learning, and whether this is appropriate and fit for purpose, *for the context in which it is used* (25 minutes).

This will be followed by a plenary, to discuss the broader issues of describing, designing, and reflecting on the ‘new open’ learning, and the role that MOOCs and other applications of social software can play in enhancing teaching and learning (20 minutes).

All participants will be invited to join the wiki and continue to contribute to post-conference discussions and further developments.

**Outcomes**

Participants will have engaged, practically and theoretically, in describing the dynamic relationships between prescribed and emergent learning. They will be able to use the framework for:

… individual, group or collaborative reflection, strategy, and design,

… between learners, teachers, facilitators, designers and researchers.

It is particularly useful for distinguishing and designing different kinds of MOOCs, but it is applicable to all kinds of learning events.