Author’s response to reviews

Title: Identity theory and education completion: A Text Analytics study of 4,432 online discussants of an 'Understanding Dementia' Massive Open Online Course

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Mr Aldrin Ulep  
Dr Peter Anderson  
Dr Dirk Van Rooy (reviewer)  
BioMed Central – Medical Education, Approaches to Teaching and Learning

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Re: Manuscript 8430778113096218 – Identity Theory and Education Completion: A Text Analytics Study of 4,432 Online Discussants of an “Understanding Dementia” Massive Open Online Course

Dear Sirs:

Thank you for your guidance and helpful suggestions in strengthening this paper, now titled Relationship between Participants’ Level of Education and Engagement in their Completion of the Understanding Dementia Massive Open Online Course. The revisions we have made in response to your comments in your email of September 3, 2014, are detailed below and shown in the revised paper. We have also attached a new title page reflecting seven, rather than five authors. The additional authors (Goldberg and McInerney) have been integral in revising the paper following the untimely death of Erica Bell. The first author (Goldberg) now is corresponding author.

We have made substantial changes to the paper. We have removed the presentation and discussion of qualitative data from the revision we are submitting. This revised paper focusses on a quantitative analysis of data in response to the following questions:

1. Is there a difference between participants who did and did not complete the MOOC with regard to level of their education?
2. Does level of education affect the number of discussion posts participants make?
3. Is there a difference between the number of discussion posts made by participants who completed and did not complete the MOOC?

Editor’s comments:
1. Comment: Please revise your manuscript to include line and page numbers.  
Response: We have added line and page numbers. There are no page breaks in the manuscript.
2. Comment: Acknowledgements. Please acknowledge anyone who contributed to the article…  
Response: We have included an Acknowledgements section to thank the editors and Dr Van Rooy for his helpful review of the earlier version of this article. A scientific (medical) writer was not involved in the development of the paper. Thus, there is no mention of this writer in the Acknowledgements section.
3. Comment: Please include the source(s) of funding for each author and for the manuscript preparation.  
Response: This manuscript was supported with funding from the JP and JR Wicking Trust. Wording to this effect has been added in the Acknowledgements section.
4. Comment: Please format your revised manuscript according to the journal style. 
Response: We have re-formatted the title page and revised the manuscript accordingly. We have also revised the title to make it as concise and informative as possible.

Reviewer’s comments:
5. The introduction fails to provide a clear definition of the question(s) being asked. Because of that, the paper appears unstructured and lacks a clear conceptual structure. ...It would be better
to start with the section, “The importance of identity to education completion and
disadvantage”...and then clearly specify how the proposed methodology and analysis address
the issues.

6. The study does not seem to be embedded well within existing literature. This is related to the
failure to clearly define the questions the paper is addressing. I believe the current analysis
paper would best be written up as an explorative paper, applying novel methodologies. But in
that case, the methodology and its limitations need to be better defined (see earlier comments).
At the moment, the paper is caught between an explorative analysis and an attempt to address
a number of vague issues.

Response: We have updated our literature review and re-written the introduction. Three
research questions are posed, as mentioned earlier in this letter. We will continue to explore
the qualitative data from the Leximancer analyses but those data are not part of the revised
paper we are submitting.

7. My greatest concern is that the methods, as they are described currently, seem to be less than
systematic. A more detailed description of the analysis (why it was chosen, what the limitations
are, etc.) to minimize impressions of subjectivity would improve the paper significantly. The
text currently mentions the “Elements of the methods described below have been published by
us using other datasets [author citation to be included after review]” which makes it impossible
to fully evaluate the method at present.

8. The limitations of the current approach could be spelled out better. For instance, how does the
applied analysis compare to other linguistic analyses?

9. The paper seems to be focused (amongst other things) on how learners that are able to
integrate the course material in terms of a relevant self-narrative are more likely to complete a
course. But it does not really provide a method that allows studying this issue in a systematic
way, which leads to conclusions such as “Understanding Dementia MOOC’s success in achieving
high completion rates for those with lower formal education appears to be linked to its diverse
use of biomedical and experiential or quality of life knowledge.”

Response: Our revision of the paper no longer applies to the concerns detailed above. We do
thank Dr Van Rooy for his comments about the linguistic analysis as they will be a great help in
the second paper we would like to refine regarding the use of Leximancer. In the current
revision, we have removed any reference to author citations that were to be added.

10. The results and discussion sections are poorly structured. It might be better to map it more
closely to the analysis phases introduced in the methodology. Also, a number of issues are
introduced that were not properly foreshadowed in the introduction (for instance,
“achievement gap”), which creates a disjointed narrative, and makes it harder for the reader to
follow the text.

11. Also, the text regularly has statements such as “This raises questions about the significance of
such typical storylines involving self-referential language in successful completion of MOOCs by
those with lower education levels” without providing any systematic follow-up (which is partly
the result of the lack of conclusive findings).

12. The discussion and conclusions go beyond the data and are often confusing and difficult to
follow. No conclusive quantitative analyses are provided to back-up qualitative interpretations
of the figures. For instance, linguistic analysis often applies some form of principal component
analysis or factor analysis to explore the relationship between the different factors that emerge
from the explorative phase of the text analysis, and how they relate to, for instance,
demographic variables. Such an approach would also allow one to study interactions and
mediations. Although the conceptual mapping suggests a number of potentially interesting
findings in terms of the spatial distribution of completers and non-completers, there is no real quantitative analysis to provide more conclusive and reliable interpretations. Instead, the text resorts to qualitative, verbal interpretations of the figures. Employing more quantitative analysis would allow making more conclusive statements about the issues at hand.

Response: The Results section now addresses the three stated research questions in sequential order and the findings are explored in the Discussion. Because of the paper’s revision, it no longer relates to the concerns described in comments 10, 11, and 12.

On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to express my sincere thanks again for your assistance and flexibility with the submission of this revised manuscript.

Lyn

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