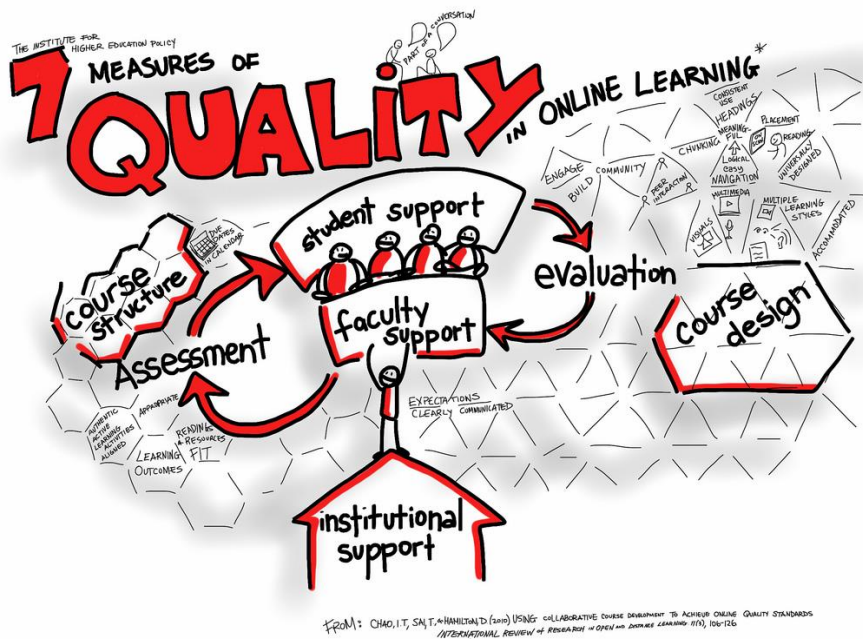


# EDU630 Final Project



## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the effectiveness of an online course on family engagement offered as a massive open online course or MOOC. Theories, course structures, best practices and technological aspects are all considered during this critique of the course.

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EDU630 Online Teaching and Learning

## MY COURSE REVIEW

A Look into the effectiveness of a MOOC course on family engagement in education

[Click here to watch slide overview video](#)

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## INTRODUCTION

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“There is a quintessentially democratic spirit embedded in the proposition that a potential student’s remote location, limited transportation options, family commitments, or work obligations will not be a barrier to the pursuit of higher education and to the opportunities it almost always provides.” (Kurzman, 2013)

*Purpose of the presentation:*

After exploring the four various types of learning environments in distance learning, I am now focusing my attention to online courses. I have been researching the educational learning theories behind courses, course design, instructional strategies/best practices associated with them and its technology. This has advanced my thinking and understanding of what an effective course should look like. Keeping this in mind, the purpose of this presentation is to look for and critique all of the above mentioned elements in an online course of my choosing and share my results.

*Course Overview:*

I selected the course, “Introduction to Family Engagement in Education.” It is a course offered by Harvard Extension School’s MOOC program, edX, from the graduate school of education (GSE)

department. It is self-described as a self-pacing course. Dr. Karen L. Mapp defines family engagement and discusses the impact it has on schools. The course overview addresses the following...

- Engages in discussions with various educational stakeholders on current practices in the field.
- Research is analyzed to learn better educational outcomes around family engagement.
- Looks at how families' engagement supports their children's learning and development, create partnerships and help school improvement.

By the end of the course, students are expected to know

- The relationship between family engagement and improved school/student outcomes from birth through high school
- The additional benefits family engagement brings to parents, educators, and communities
- What the research shows about the importance of engaging families

The course provides an introductory video of the course by Dr. Mapp [here](#).

*Rationale:*

I selected "Introduction to Family Engagement in Education" because this was the only course I reviewed that was related to the education field. I chose to critique this course because it addresses an extremely important topic pertinent to my work as an elementary school teacher... family engagement.

Thinking in terms of teaching the whole child, research shows that "growth has been aided by social, economic, and technological advances that have re-positioned its role within higher education from the periphery to center stage." (Courtney and Wilhoite-Mathews, 2015) Even at the elementary level, teachers should be providing opportunities for students to gain content knowledge, leadership, technological and social skills that will assist them at the secondary level. This will lay the foundation for students to be reflective, collaborative and continuous learners in the future.

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*Link to THEORY*

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Many different philosophical approaches are considered when constructing an online course. These methods can include behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism and more. The theory that applies to this new form of distance learning is connectivism. Connectivism was promoted by George Siemens and Stephen Downes. Their work led to massive open online courses or MOOCs. According to the connectivism theory, students are able to direct their own learning and draw information from various sources using a virtual setting. (Barnett & Sandies, 2013)

Connectivism is learning that is self-directed and self-paced. It provides opportunities for interaction between peers. This type of learning comprises of flexible learning activities, individualized learning as well as collaboration through emerging technologies. This “interdependence results in effective knowledge flow, enabling the personal understanding of the state of activities organizationally. Use of social media tools also provides opportunities for external learning situations that are not always available, or feasible, in face-to-face classrooms.” (Mallon, 2013)

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*COURSE REVIEW*

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*Technological Requirements:*

I was unable to locate on this site, a minimum technical skill requirements needed to be successful in this course. However, there was a link provided at the bottom of every webpage entitled “Help Center” for learners who were in need of tech support. There is also an accessibility web page with additional

information and a form to collect questions, concerns and/or feedback around this area. According to the “Online Course Development Guide and Rubric” by the University of Southern Mississippi Learning Enhancement Center, an effective course provides a substantial amount of resources to facilitate online learning as well as providing tools for viewing and instruction for using those tools (ie: real player, pdf or adobe reader, and etc). This course outlines how to use the search and engagement tools and what indicators mean (ie: blue star on discussion post means it has been endorsed by a staff member).

*Best Practices:*

There were signs of quality practices.

- Primary sources of information was available. Interviews of diverse experts in the field were gathered to enhance student’s online learning experience.
- Ongoing evaluations were given throughout the online process to check for student’s understanding and to progress monitor. These came in the form of a variety of methods which included quizzes, questions and student feedback.
- The course was self-paced. This contributes to students successfully completing learning outcomes because its done at their own speed. This is especially beneficial for those more advanced students who prefer a faster pace or for students whose modifications would include additional time or for them to replay or revisit certain areas.
- Additional resources were provided for students to expand on their learning. Resources included information on community organizing on the topic of parent engagement, surveys, list of community organization and etc. as next steps.

*Critique:*

For the purpose of this course critique, I primarily used the “[Online Course Development Guide and Rubric](#)” by the University of Southern Mississippi Learning Enhancement Center. The rubric scale was from 1 to 3 (1 being exemplary, 2 being sufficient and 3 being needs revision).

There were 6 categories: 1. Design of instruction 2. Course structure and organization 3. Learner support and resources 4. Learner interaction and collaboration 5. Effective use of course technology and 6. Assessment and evaluation. The course scored mostly 1s and a few 2s. There was no category where this course needed complete revision. However, I do outline some important strengths and areas of improvement below.

### **Strengths**

There are a set of guidelines put in place to ensure meaningful conversations and discussion etiquette online. This speaks to the category, learner interaction and collaboration. In this course, the “expectations of minimal student participation [is] clearly defined.” (Online course, n.d) The course lists to what degree students should be participating and to the degree in which they should be interacting with one another. For example, students must post their discussion response and respond to at least two of their peers.

Learners are acquiring authentic, firsthand knowledge from experts in the field who are speaking from multiple perspectives (racial, gender and professional diversity). According to iNACOL open course standards, an effective “online teacher knows and understands the need for professional activity and collaboration.” This professor understands this and solicits interviews from a diverse expert pool to provide primary sources.

There is continuous evaluation through various formative and summative assessments throughout the course. They are used to assess student learning along with student feedback on the sections in order to

improve the online learning experience. The formative assessments include discussions, response to question prompts, checks for understandings & quizzes, student feedback, reflections on the course design and a progress tab. Not only are there ongoing evaluations, but there are a wide variety of them to track student learning and to track their progress throughout the course.

**Areas in need of improvement:**

I found that the course lacks collaboration and/or team work assignments. While there are discussions throughout the course, there are no varied opportunities for interaction setup where learners are given the opportunity to partner up, work in groups or engage in conversations on other platforms.

There was also no variety in use of new technological tools. Other than the program being online, there was no use of discussion boards, chat rooms, social media platforms, prezi, coggle, rubistar and options for the use of other assistive technological tools.

No opportunities for students to self-assess. While there are areas for reflection throughout the course, the reflections are on the effectiveness of the actual course, its structure and its materials. It is not on the student's own learning. While formative assessments help to gage a student's growth, the ability for a student to reflect on their own learning is also important. There is a tab where they can check their progress, but there is no place for them to self-reflect on that progress.

All of the areas of improvement listed above are crucial to the learner's experience. We need to ensure we are able to reach all of our diverse learners. "Successful learning occurs when it is contextualised, social, conversational, collaborative and reflective." (Todhunter, 2013)



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## CONCLUSION

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Online learning plays a significant role in transforming the learner's experience. Learning environments has now evolved well beyond the walls of the traditional classroom. We must ensure that the instruction and learning via these new methods meet rigorous standards and are met with fidelity. I used the Online Course Development Guide and Rubric to review an open online course relevant to my classroom work.

Harvard's GSE's "Introduction to Family Engagement in Education" is an overall worthwhile course to undertake. I would especially recommend it for its decision to incorporate interviews from leading experts in the field of education. They are diverse in various aspects and look at family engagement from authentic and different perspectives. We are able to access a wealth of knowledge from these primary sources. The course also uses multiple strategies to measure the learner's knowledge and skills. My recommendations include a place to keep an online journal or PLE for self-reflection and to have learners research their own potential next steps beyond the course.

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