

The PodMag

Karen Foley:

Happy New Year and welcome to the January PodMag. I'm Karen Foley and in this news audio from the Open University, from Social Sciences and Psychology we're going to hear from Graham Pike about the Forensic Psychology Witness Identification MOOC. And Umut Erel told me about some exciting methodologies that she's using in her latest research project.

Well early January is certainly a unique time of year. We've just had Christmas which can be a time of really mixed emotions. Some of us have been eating too much and it's common to make a fresh start in the New Year. Some of you may be looking forward to starting a new module with the Open University in February but others might be midway through the modules that started in October. But whatever you're at with your studies staying motivated especially at this time of year, it could be a real challenge.

We've recently heard from Georgina Blakeley, the Module Chair of DD102 about her ideas for students over the Christmas period. And in December she asked people to give tips for other students about motivation on her Friday Thinker slot on the faculty Facebook page.

I'm going to read those out later but firstly let's have a think about MOOC's, Massive Open Online Courses. The OU are one of the partners and one of the largest MOOC providers, FutureLearn. And if you go to FutureLearn.com you can see a huge range of MOOC's that are commencing shortly. And so many people have said to me, oh I really must get around to doing a MOOC. So I thought that this would make a nice feature to look at for January.

Now the MOOC that Graham leads is a really interesting one. Whilst the OU are involved in many this is a really popular choice for those with an interest in Criminology and Psychology. Although you don't need any experience in either to be involved. Here's what Graham had to say.

Hi Graham. Thanks for talking to me today. I'd like to spend a bit of time thinking about your Forensic Psychology MOOC which is in its third run. We've currently had two of those a year. And I'd like you to tell us what it's all about because this is a very different sort of way of running a MOOC. Can you tell us how you stage some of the content for this?

Graham Pike:

Hi Karen. Yeah we're very proud of the MOOC. It's on Forensic Psychology and it follows a criminal investigation and it explores the psychology behind what's going on behind

the witnesses and behind why the police do what they did. It uses material that we filmed with the BBC for a series called Eye Witness and in that series and what we did was stage crimes in front of witnesses and then get the Greater Manchester Police to investigate them. And we had hidden cameras, we could see what happened in the crime and we filmed in the police stations so we could follow the investigation.

So what we're doing here is using one of those crimes which was an armed robbery of a security firm which was staged in Manchester. We constructed two fictional detectives, one good and one bad cop and one kind of very modern police officer who uses all the modern techniques and does everything by the book. A good old fashioned second kind of bad cop who uses his instinct, and you know always gets his man, and you know it could be in *The Sweeney*.

So we follow each of those investigating this crime. So the only evidence they have is from witnesses. So they interview the witnesses in various ways and try to pick out what happened. And of course they both end up with quite different opinions about what happened in the crime. And you get to follow that. You get to see if you can solve the crime as well as them and as well as the Greater Manchester Police. But we also then explore the psychology behind memory, perception, attention, interviewing, how to get the best from memory and things like that.

So it's looking at psychology and it's also looking at criminal investigation. So we tend to get two kind of groups of people, people interested in psychology but we also get people who are very interested in forensics who watch CSI and do lots of the other Forensic Science MOOC's that are around. And we get, in that second category, we actually get a lot of amateur novelists. So there's millions of people around the world who are writing books and a lot of them write crime books and they do MOOC's like this because it's a very good way of finding out what happens in reality. You know, what investigative techniques are actually used by the police and, you know, what research is going on and it's a good way of kind of getting in to the psychology of witnesses and victims and things like that.

Karen Foley:

Ah, fantastic. So tell us a bit about how it works because it's over an eight week period isn't it? And people can sign up for this beforehand and then during those eight weeks the facilitators and a group of learners sort of move progressively through the material. And then of course people can pick up on that if they've registered at a later date if say they haven't been able to see some of the content that was available one week. How does that all work then in terms of community of learners? There must be quite a buzz about it when it's all happening.

Graham Pike:

It is. Our MOOC is fairly unique in that all the other MOOC's that you sign up to. Yeah, there's a registration period which lasts throughout the course. You know, so if it's an

eight week course eight weeks and for, you know, a month or two beforehand. But what usually happens in a MOOC is you have access to the entire course. So you could complete the entire course in the first day if you wanted to but most people follow the study calendar doing what they're supposed to each week.

With ours we release each week a week at a time. Now the reason we do that is because it's about solving a crime. It's a "who done it". And if we release the entire course some students would complete it all in the first week and know who had done it and would kind of spoil it for everyone else. So we kind of approached it like we were making a serialised, you know, Crime of War a TV programme. So each week a week gets released and, you know, and the next bit of the investigation happens. And it's not until right at the end that you get to find out who done it.

So that means that although you can do the course at your own rate, take as long as you want to do it. What we find is that most of the discussion, most of the chat happens as each week's released. And our facilitators who are kind of tutoring a course, you know, concentrate their time there. So, you know, if you can, you don't have to but if you can do it according to the study calendar you benefit from that discussion, you benefit from kind of a very active group of people who are all trying to work out who done it.

Karen Foley:

And you've got a lot on your plate. I mean, tell us why you're involved with the MOOC? What special about this for you?

Graham Pike:

I'm very passionate about the Open University's mission to widen participation in higher education. I don't like the idea of knowledge and teaching and learning at university level kind of being hidden away in these elitist institutions. So, you know, I'm very proud to work for the Open University that tries to bring higher education to anybody who wants to study it. But I think we have to realise that doing a formal course, studying for a degree, offer a qualification is a very good deal. And there are lots of people, for whatever reason, you know they're at a point in their life where they can't manage to do that.

These are small bite sized chunks which are entirely free. The study itself is paced. So it's just a fantastic way of bringing all the wonderful research and brilliant teaching and learning that goes on at universities and making it completely accessible and available to anybody who wants to study it.

Karen Foley:

Well I know lots of students who've studied this MOOC and they've really, really enjoyed it, so thank you for that Graham.

Graham Pike:

My pleasure Karen.

Karen Foley:

Well anyone can do a MOOC. And whilst it's common that those with an academic background take part in them they're also a really good way to encourage friends and family to learn something new, and for free.

OK so next I wanted to share an interview with you from Umut Erel. Previously I told you that she'd been awarded a grant from the Economic & Social Research Council and sounded really interesting. And I wanted to find out more.

Here's what she told me.

Karen Foley:

Hi Umut, thanks for seeing me today. So you have been awarded an ESRC grant. Can you tell us about it?

Umut Erel:

Yes. It's about participatory methods. It's a really exciting project that is trying to look at how participatory theatre methods and also working methods can be used more widely in social science research. And what we are going to do is we're going to produce something like a toolkit and training material for other social science researchers. And that includes people working in universities but it's also for people working perhaps at NGO's or in other sectors.

Karen Foley:

And so what are these participatory theatre methods all about then?

Umut Erel:

OK. This is a method that we've tried out before in a pilot project you might say which has looked at Migrant Mothers. And this one is going to look at Migrant Parents but also Migrant Young People. And what we're interested in is finding out about their ideas and feelings of belonging and also about their ideas, oh and feelings of participation. How they feel they can participate in their neighbourhood, etc.

And how it works is this. We're starting out with two sessions of what is called Playback Theatre. So we're asking people and the group to tell us a particularly important experience or a story about their feelings of belonging. And then this will be played back by professional actors and musicians to them. And this can become a really powerful experience where people feel that their experiences are being recognised, yeah. And validated because it's being put in to an artistic form, if you will, and that's really the power of art sometimes. It can condense what we experience in a very brief moment of time and at the same time make it really intelligible to a larger group of people. So that's one method we're using.

And another method is called foreign theatre. And in that method or a technique what people do is they talk about a particular experience that they have had in their real life. And that oftentimes is an experience of conflict or a difficult experience that they didn't know how to resolve in reality. And then they would play that experience and others from the same group can then intervene, take the role of one of the participants in the scene and change their behaviour and see what would happen, yeah.

Karen Foley:

Yeah.

Umut Erel:

We oftentimes think, oh I wish I had said this, I wish I had done that, OK. And this form of theatre really is an opportunity for people to actually do it and see what would happen, yeah. Obviously this is in theatre but this technique of foreign theatre is part of a wider repertoire if you will of theatre of the oppressed it is called, that was developed by Augusto Boal in the 70s' in Latin America. And it was meant to really be a rehearsal for social change in real life and social action in real life.

Karen Foley:

So you're not only doing research on all this but you're also piloting this toolkit so that others can use some of these methodologies as well. That sounds really exciting Umut. And when are you beginning?

Umut Erel:

We're starting in January.

Karen Foley:

Wonderful. Well I look forward to hearing more about it. Thank you.

Umut Erel:

Thank you.

Karen Foley:

Well returning to the theme of the New Year resolutions and all that we wanted to update some of the features that we're including in the PodMag. I was thinking about having more profile type pieces, you know, about how people got to where they are. And also more vox pops and interviews with students.

So if you can think of anything that you would like to see here or may be tell us what you like or don't like so much please email us at PodMag@open.ac.uk I can even do phone interviews now. So if you'd like to tell us why you're studying then please do let me know. I'd really love to hear from you.

But to get us started on this I wanted to return to the Friday Thinker I spoke about earlier and the question that Georgina asked about motivation. Well there were some really good ideas and I wanted to read out just a few of those.

Dean Markham said that he thought the best way to keep motivated was to keep studying. He says that even 20 minutes here and there could be enough to settle your anxieties regarding falling behind.

And Alison Wilson agreed with this but she adds that it's also good to keep small achievements in mind and that's why she like the TMA's, little steps lead to great things. Well Alison I think that's a great way of looking at it. And it's important to consider also then what you're trying to achieve in each assignment and viewing your successes in those terms also.

Johan also talked about remembering what it was that inspired you to study in the first place. Sometimes focusing on the end goal can inspire us to keep going when things seem difficult.

And Sara Matthias says I think life teaches you so much, you don't grasp the simple concepts, in here she's talking about motivation and hard work paying off until you've gone through the passage of experience. She says that she now embraces constructive criticism from her tutors which, you know, may be at 18 or 19 years old she wouldn't have done so much. And it spurs her on to do better. She also adds that the study planner keeps her in check and also the forums. It's good to see where others are at as distance learning can be isolating.

And Ben Thompson says keeping focused on your end goal and never being afraid to say that you're finding it hard, not just to your tutor but also to fellow students, no one will think badly of you and that is so true Ben.

John Beaulieu adds many interesting tips but one thing that really resonated with me was his comment, it's your choice to succeed in whatever you choose. And that's important to remember.

From all of these ideas there was a sense of studying for a reason and also of being in control of that process. I guess that for all of us finding a way to remember these things and to go with what works for us is most useful.

And those are some of the tips from the Friday Thinker Facebook page and the discussion with Georgina Blakeley in December. But don't forget it does happen each Friday, so do make sure that you've liked the OU Social Sciences Facebook page and you can get involved in that also.

Well that is all we have time for unfortunately in this edition but don't forget to email me your thoughts and any suggestions please, PodMag@open.ac.uk

And have a great New Year. I hope there's been something in this issue that has inspired you.

Bye for now and see you next month.