

MOOCs: should the rest of us bother?

Blog post by Laura Czerniewicz

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We all agree that the Year of the MOOC is over and that the promises of cost effective new business models to solve deeply entrenched problems are turning out to be hollow. Turns out that MOOCs are serving an existing over-subscribed group of male graduates from the global north and that access to and for the world's poorest countries has been low. Turns out the quality is as good or as bad as any other course. (And we won't talk about completion rates!) With the discourse largely about business models rather than pedagogical models, should we not shrug and turn away?

When one of the Founding Fathers declares defeat and says that MOOC are not a good fit for struggling students, and another says that MOOCs should get rid of "the massive and the open" should those of us dealing with harsh, resource-constrained, and historically complex educational systems and extremely diverse student bodies not just say "We told you so" and get on with slaying our dragons slowly and systematically as we always have done?

We weren't the ones innovating in Canada and we didn't get the capital to venture into something new and different, so should we even join the bandwagon at all?

Actually, yes.



MOOCs have been the lightning rod that draws attention to a whole lot of inter-related issues about online learning and about open education. They have become a kind of shorthand for all sorts of complicated educational matters (what we call "ingewikkeld" round here). So this is why I think that educators, researchers and universities in developing countries, and in the less well resourced parts of developed countries, should be thinking about and planning and conceptualising MOOCs.

- Because engaging with MOOCs gives us an entry to talking about online learning and about learning and curriculum design with people with whom we have not had those conversations before. And many of us who have been working in the trenches know a lot about these teaching and learning issues.
- Because we consider MOOCs as one possibility in a whole basket of emergent online possibilities including open boundary courses, wrapped MOOCs, SPOCs and whatever else is coming into being as we try things out.
- Because we are excited about the pedagogical possibilities and look forward to experimenting in local conditions.
- Because we do want access to all that interesting new stuff that is being made available freely online for those of us with the capacity to access it. It's great being exposed to so much stimulating material so easily. And preferably we would like it licensed in ways that would allow us to adapt for local use.
- Because we are fed up the global north's domination of online content and fear that MOOCs will only make that worse. So we want to get our own resources online.
- Because we know that there are numerous topics – from archaeology to health to literature – of general international and niche interest that we are in the best position to teach and make widely available. (And it depresses us that the first MOOC on African cities is being offered by a French institution.)
- Because we take that third university pillar of social engagement and community service really seriously. The development mission is a genuine imperative for many of us; MOOCs and other forms of online learning and open learning can serve that commitment very well.
- Because being a late adopter means we get to benefit from some real and robust research, not just the hype of the early days.

We don't believe in quick fixes, and we don't think that MOOCs are the answer. But we welcome the opportunity to experiment and to add more strategies to our efforts to address local educational challenges.

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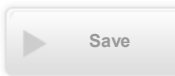
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