

A MOOC by Any Other Name...

We'll start [MOOC MOOC](#) by working synchronously and asynchronously to co-create a single short essay about MOOCs, a wild experiment in mass-collaboration.

One day. A mass of folks in a Google Doc. 1 essay.

If you're new to Google Docs, and want a bit of helpful advice, take a look at Jesse Stommel's article, [Theorizing Google Docs: 10 Tips for Navigating Online Collaboration](#). Here are a couple of important highlights:

"A potential pitfall of this sort of work is a variation of the [bystander effect](#), whereby participants will see a problem or gap in the document but assume someone else will fix it. The more collaborators involved, the more the effect is amplified." **So, make sure to jump in where you see you're needed!**

"Embrace chaos. There is something slightly crazy about a shared writing space, especially when there are more than 2 contributing authors. A Google Doc can seem to write itself, a new digital ecosphere that bubbles with lively and chaotic energy. I'm frequently startled when I leave a Google Doc to realize that *it will go on without me*. If you haven't collaborated within a Google Doc ... Don't be surprised when weird and sometimes wondrous things begin to happen."

Ready? Set. Go!

Click the Comments button in the upper right corner to discuss the changes, and use the Insert->Comment menu to post notes on selected text.

Instructions:

1. Consider these questions: **What is a MOOC? What does it do, and what does it not do?**
2. Collaborate as a group (a potentially very large group) in this document to write one **exactly 1000-word** essay that responds to both questions. (For a word count at any point, highlight the body of the essay, then go to Tools > Word Count in the main menu.)
3. Somewhere in the essay, reference (quote or cite) each of the following articles:
 - [Let's Talk about MOOC \(online\) Education--And Also About Massively Outdated Traditional Education \(MOTEs\)](#) - by Cathy Davidson
 - [What's the Matter with MOOCs?](#) - by Siva Vaidhyanathan
 - [The Language of MOOCs](#) - by Audrey Watters
4. Include (and attribute) a single picture chosen via <http://search.creativecommons.org/>.
5. Revise and title the finished essay. Keep these instructions at the top of the document.

All this before 6:00 PM Eastern time.

General Q&A:

- **Before Eastern time what day? Monday, August 13** ([link](#)) ([Time in the rest of the world.](#))
- What to do if I see something wrong? Propose a new idea. Mark the old in **red** for a while before removing it completely, to see if there is consensus.

MOOCs: Changing Modes of Pedagogy

The birth of MOOC

The term MOOC, or Massive Open Online Course, was generated as a result of “Connectivism and Connective Knowledge,” a for-credit course offered at the University of Manitoba but also made available for free to the general public and taught by George Siemens and Stephen Downes. Two of the 2,300 non-paying students, Dave Cormier and Bryan Alexander, coined the term in response to participating in the course.¹

What does MOOC stand for?

In this section we will explain MOOCs as an abstract concept, or what [Max Weber](#) called an [ideal type](#).

Massive: A typical classroom can hold 30 students or even more. An auditorium around 300. A massive class can go exponentially beyond these numbers: thousands, hundred-thousands, or even millions, a group size beyond [Dunbar](#)’s number for a ‘tribe’ (500-2500 individuals).

Open: Available for free and to anyone willing and able to participate. Not bound by geography or time zones. Uses open tools. Uses open educational resources and creative commons licensed assets. Generates open content that can, in turn, be reused freely.

Online: Use of the Internet, where individual people from all over the world can participate in the event. Includes access via mobile devices.

Course: A sequence of lessons imparting knowledge via an instructor, who guides the process and established guidelines for participation, earning credit, and passing. Conversely, Davidson uses the ‘C’ to stand for “courseware,” and sees the MOOC as the platform to run the learning on, not the act of learning itself.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course

As David Wiley notes, however, [not everything that is called a MOOC meets every point of the acronym](#). Indeed, MOOCs, in practice, have become a set of competing concepts. Tanya Roscorla now posits that there are [two main types](#) of MOOCs: the xMOOC and the connectivist MOOC. The xMOOC “emphasizes content mastery, centralizes courses on one website and uses automated grading tools to support hundreds of thousands of students” whereas the connectivist MOOC emphasizes social learning and relies heavily on social media, blogs and LMS features to decentralize the learning process.²

What is new and what is not new in MOOCs? [Bonnie Stewart](#) explains that massive open courses have existed since the 1970s, when Michel Foucault would teach courses open to everyone who was interested for free. Indeed, the concept of free education even extends back to Socrates, who reportedly refused payment for his instruction, according to Plato and Xenophon. MOOCs institutionalize and standardize the concept of free education. Instead of individual professors offering open courses, there are sites with standardized technology where multiple instructors offer multiple courses. Modern MOOCs are therefore more accessible to wider range of participants, regardless of geographic location.

Of course, not all MOOCs are the same, nor are they created equal. As [Cathy Davidson](#) explains, “Some online learning is so smart, really brilliantly researched and designed. Some stinks. Just like face to face. But we have to understand the assumptions about and behind learning, not just the historical contingencies of the particular system of higher education we happen to inhabit in 2012.”

What does a MOOC do?

The best of the MOOCs take advantage of the latest Internet technologies to help people collaborate, through Google Docs, social networking sites, etc., to facilitate the process of a high number of people learning together.

[Siva Vaidhyanathan](#) states, “The strangest thing about this MOOC obsession is the idea that something that very wealthy private institutions offer for free, at a loss, as a service to humanity, must somehow represent the magic numbers in the higher-education lottery. It’s new, it’s “innovative,” and it’s big, the thinking goes. So it must be the answer.” Maybe the innovation inherent in MOOC teaching is not so much what happens on the instruction side, which in many cases essentially replicates traditional teaching, but in what the participants are doing. The collaborative aspects of MOOCs allow for the student to also become the teacher, reinforcing key concepts, and creating connections through other students without the intervention of an instructor.

² Roscorla, Tanya. “Massively Open Online Courses are ‘Here to Stay.’” *Convergemag.com*. 18 Jul. 2012. Web 13 Aug. 2012.



MOOCs allow for collaboration that is not immediately available in a traditional style classroom.

What does it not do?

MOOCs do not replace nor replicate traditional classroom instruction. For example, instructors should not simply take existing course content, place it on the Web and shout “Go!” MOOCs need to go beyond classroom instruction. MOOCs may replace the classroom **instruction** part, but not the places where the learners get together. Like a flipped classroom, the MOOC instructor designs the opportunities, but it is the learners who enact them.

“The delivery of course content is not the same as education.” [[Siva Vaidhyanathan](#)] and [Cathy Davidson](#) explains that “talking heads do not equal an educational paradigm shift.” xMOOCs rely primarily on the “talking heads” approach to learning, and tend to somewhat replicate the classroom lecture experience. Connectivist MOOCs supply more than just talking heads. In a constructivist MOOC, a paradigm shift occurs in the scale of and options for communication, in stark contrast to traditional classrooms where being quiet is expected. Even relatively progressive classrooms cannot offer the same scale of possibilities for communication.

MOOCs: a wrap-up

What are MOOCs trying to achieve in the world of learning and pedagogy? TV isn’t just radio

with an image of the radio reporter (which is what early TV shows looked like). Film isn't just about capturing and broadcasting a stage play. MOOCs aren't just about recording and broadcasting lectures.

Ideally MOOCs should facilitate active and productive learning relationships. In this sense learning in MOOCs is not about storing given content, but creating innovative, fresh knowledge through communication with peers, giving new shape to shared meanings and concepts.

[Laura Gibbs](#)' vision of an ideal MOOC is that they are an opportunity to create content collaboratively and to curate existing content.³ In this way a MOOC becomes an environment where a Community of Practice develops, and where members interact and learn from each other, sharing understanding, solving problems collaboratively and defining their identity as practitioners. Etienne Wenger⁴ states that a CoP "has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest" and "implies a commitment to the domain".⁵

One of the challenges for MOOCs is how to reconcile their being massive and serving diverse populations with the need to adapt to the learning preferences, levels of prior learning, and tastes of individual students. In order to meet this challenge, MOOCs of the future will likely need to be in some degree learner-built, with different options for addressing the material created as the courses go on. This will mean allowing learners to be teachers, and teachers to be learners as Paulo Freire advocates in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. MOOCs need to be communities of "pupilteachers" (to borrow a term from *Finnegans Wake*), where communication between participant serves as a basis for collaborative knowledge shaping.

** Our brainstorming already amounts to 1428 words. We will need to cut out some of the above ideas (11:01am EST)

** Count at 1473 as of 3:26 EST. Keep cutting! -- heather

** 1206 now 3:37 EST - Annalisa

** 1179 @ 3:52 EST

³ http://www.hybridpedagogy.com/Journal/files/MOOC_MOOC.html and <http://courserafantasy.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/creation-curation-and-virtual-trash-can.html?m=1>

⁴ Wenger, E. Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, and Identity. 1998. Cambridge

⁵ <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>



Well-built physical and digital learning spaces, while appearing separate, share affinity under the ground

[The caption above or the poem below?](#)

The tree holds up well; the reed bends.

The wind doubles its trying;

And does so well that it uproots

That, the head of which was neighbor to the sky,

And the feet of which touched the empire of the dead.

[Jean de la Fontaine, transl . Eli Siegel]Eric Siegel 1968, *Hail, American Development*, Definition Press

<http://www.aestheticrealism.net/poetry/Oak-Reed-LaFontaine.htm>



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Thoughts during the writing process:

- What about mining the [tweets from the sunday social](#) for nuggets? [Good idea](#)
- Let's not be afraid to incorporate comments from other users on the articles we're examining here, if the opportunity is appropriate.

Chunks of text removed from main document:

MOOCs should not be used as a vehicle to cut costs. University administrators would be remiss in using MOOCs as a way to reach hundreds or thousands of students with only one faculty member.

MOLC - Massive Open Learning Community ;-) (new acronym)

Affordances of MOOCs

- Importance of massive for business model, making free or low cost viable.
- Able to reach people in peripheral areas and countries where access to higher education is difficult
- High likelihood that some like-minded people also are taking the course [due to massive scale]
- Others taking the class will probably know the answer to questions coming up and can post an answer no matter where they're located [due to massive scale and open nature of course].
- Foster an international community of learners.
- For the institutions that adhere to the trend, the appeal seems to lie in their seemingly ability to reach students all over the globe, while strengthening their brand as innovators (Bradshaw, 2012).

**** Although this paragraph has good points, someone added a separate paragraph that mirrored much of what this one said, so for right now I've moved it to the "removed" section. ~heather**

The key objective of MOOCs is to democratize education. That is, make learning accessible, and make it great. By accessible we mean many things: MOOCs must be financially affordable, compliant with people's life situation, available to people with limited or no Internet, fitting for people with diverse backgrounds, etc. By great we mean: lasting learning outcomes, great learning experiences. Ultimately MOOCs should make learning as much fun as it is to play video games or solving cross word puzzles - yet with great learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are essential here. MOOCs will only work if they empower their participants. Accessibility and greatness are high bars, but this is what MOOCs must strive to achieve.

Important, true, and off-topic--Cynthia

Although they bring the possibility of reaching a population of learners that comes to a

previously unimagined number, it is clear that MOOCs are not for everyone. Those who still favour having a more customized and face-to-face contact with their tutors and peers will not be comfortable in the medium; however, those who jump in the wagon are more likely to be participating in a course due to their true curiosity and thirst for actual learning - in contrast to the many who attend universities and colleges just for the sake of getting that “piece of paper” to put on their wall.