

# Editorial

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## The MOOC Revolution: A new form of education from the technological paradigm?

La revolución MOOCs, ¿una nueva educación desde el paradigma tecnológico?

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**D**uring this last year, we have witnessed a huge tidal wave in the university world. Many people have been talking about MOOCs (Massive On-line Open Courses) as a potential revolution that has arrived from North America. MOOCs have the primary aim of changing the fixed dynamics of rigid university training models and the traditional organizational structures of universities. Those who are still unfamiliar with the term «MOOC», often enquire about this subject with a mixture of discretion and curiosity – receiving a plethora of replies that end up being of little help.

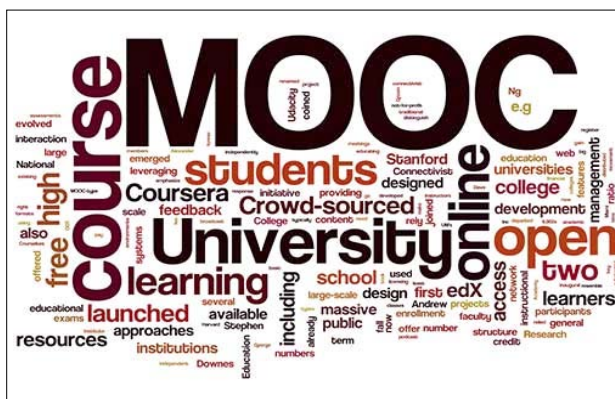
**W**ithout doubt, though, higher education is metamorphosing into a global activity: the spreading of this technology is not only unstoppable, but also omnipotent and omnipresent during the entire process. Moreover, the so-called «technophobes» are becoming less and less hesitant as they adopt more defensive tactics, e.g. by claiming that there is a «false onsite presence». Indeed, this is their baton to defend traditional education.

**H**owever, these Massive Open Courses which have intentionally been designated the Anglo-Saxon acronym «MOOC» actually have very little in common. This is despite their apparent «free status» and their being called «massive» (massive referring to multitudes of globally connected people who are simultaneously studying online courses and who are dynamically interacting with each other).

**W**ithout doubt, there is a revolutionary process underway in conceiving the «here» and «now» of teaching, namely its «ubiquity» and «temporality» – both concepts of which have now been completely reformulated. At the same time, though, teacher-student interactions, especially the relationships among students who collaboratively develop their own learning, are also linked to the seeking of accreditation and the certification of academic courses (i.e. where there is more or less a visible business opportunity for these projects).

**F**or Lewin, however, MOOCs pose a challenge for the near future, which is exciting, impressive, and completely unpredictable. As Aguaded, Sevillano and Vasquez have recently pointed out (Scopeo Bulletin, June 2013), following the initial «boom» (which in Spain began with seemingly ambitious projects financially supported by big businesses, financial entities and several universities), the reflections, questioning, and critique of the models arose as result of their didactic characteristics, namely their pedagogical design, the interactions that were created, and the roles of the professors and students. In other words, it referred to the model and the educational philosophy that underpinned these training activities.

**O**n the other hand, there are technological questions that are also significant such as the process of monetization, the authenticity of participants, and the certification of courses. In Spain, the increase in the implementation of these projects, especially those that are more geared towards business initiatives than innovative academic commitment, have aided the observation of academic courses during the initial phase of implementation. Indeed, the impression one got was that they appeared to be poor-quality videos



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of «real professors with limited perspective on an issue». Typically, these were professors who would write a series of self-evaluation questions, or who would distribute certificates without receiving official confirmation about the authenticity of the person who did the tasks, or whose only interest was financial gain.

**F**or this reason, it is imperative to ask oneself the question: which model are we using? At least, this should be done from the point of view of fora such as these, or an educational and communications journal such as «Comunicar», which, in this 20th anniversary edition, as with the other volumes, permanently upholds the critical and intelligent usage of technologies in the teaching-learning process, i.e. as a «means» and not as an «end» to improving quality.

**C**an the MOOC revolution thus respond to a traditional-conductist model, i.e. where knowledge is transmitted unidirectionally and massively – without taking into consideration learning contexts? Can this be achieved, moreover, by using a horizontal model with people learning interactively, that is, where the teacher is reduced to standardized multimedia packages, or where there is no solid foundation for evaluation? Furthermore, if these factors were to be translated haphazardly within the framework of a conductist system without obtaining a certificate and with using prescribed economic rates<sup>–</sup>, would institutional altruism truly exist? Or, is this simply a new university model to be implemented? Put simply, would this be a business model that would generate a new emerging degree mill system under the title of ‘free teaching’?

**A**s Sevillano, Vázquez and Aguaded have already pointed out, the philosophical-pedagogical model that underpins the MOOC proposal does not necessarily have to be conductist-commercial. We would certainly consider this model as an opportunity to take advantage of the infinite possibilities that technology offers us today, that is, to generate «ubiquitous» and «emerging» learning that is of a high standard. Thus, from the perspective of PLEs, LMS and Youtube, the management and development of MOOCs with poorly developed pedagogical designs and little collaboration, would be impertinent.

**T**he two main characteristics that differentiate MOOCs from other traditional e-learning training models are that they are «freely available» and are offered on a «massive» scale. In order for this movement to continue progressing, however, it is essential to re-conceptualize MOOCs and to avoid current fads in this field. By so doing, we will create a more sustainable and didactic model. MOOCs could therefore become an exceptional learning experience. However, today they are inadequate as an educational experience – seeing that they still lack some vital components. To this end, Vázquez has made an important contribution by filling these gaps and providing sustainable evaluation and a verifiable/certifiable learning model that consists of optimum interactions with instructors and facilitators, planned collaborative work that is genuinely interactive, and the effective development of transferable skills... Nonetheless, there is still a risk of converting this type of training into another business, namely to «McDonaldise» or commodify MOOCs, and to clothe them with a biased form of training and culture, which is typically westernized. The MOOC movement has thus yet to discover the cultural and linguistic diversity of various socio-cultural contexts. This can only be done by steering away from initial training standardization of an imperialist nature.

**F**inally, «sustainable» MOOCs should aim to promote pedagogical models based on multiculturalism, the diversity of contexts, multilingualism, the synthesis of local and global cultures (glocal), and commercial processes. However, this should be done without undue ambition or excessive commercial gain – behind which we often find big companies and consortia. The Google model is, despite its weaknesses, an interesting option to explore.

