



MOOCS ARE DEAD! – OPEN EDUCATION AND THE QUALITY OF ONLINE COURSES TOWARDS A COMMON QUALITY REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This paper presents the current status of Open Education and MOOCs as the main instruments and drivers in the publicity. The evolution from e-Learning towards MOOCs and Open Education is introduced as basis to discuss the main question of this paper: Is Open Education a revolution or are MOOCs only marketing instruments? According to Marx, a revolution is the complete change of the production relations and means and their new ownership and direction towards changed production power. Transferred to Open Education, the current question is whether Open Education is indeed a social revolution for individual learners, educational institutions and the society worldwide or whether MOOCs as the most prominent appearance of open learning are only marketing instruments by the traditional educational systems. The presentation at EDEN Conference 2016 will start the debate and following research will provide further argumentations for future discussions.

Open Education: What is the Current Situation?

Open and Openness are becoming more and more in vogue: It is not a fashion but an increasing requirement due to dramatic changes in societies. Therefore open education is raising interest as well as gaining adaptation, implementations and success. In parallel open research is getting popular through the opportunities for researchers to share their results among themselves. While these developments are taking root, another phenomenon suddenly appeared and changed the public discussion on open courses: Massive Open Online Courses, called MOOCs. This article outlines the relation between these movements and the (“older”) E-Learning.

What is Open Education?

Open Education is as manifold as the term openness: It can be related to quite diverse approaches and understandings. Generally, open education is related to learning innovations and learning quality changing the educational environments and offering selections of methodologies, tasks and resources by the learners. Learning innovations and learning quality are important and reflected topics for a very long time from the beginning of discussions and theories about learning processes: In Europe, Plato’s Allegory of the Cave is one of the earliest

examples. Their debate continued during the introduction of the first universities in the Middle Age and of the school systems in the 18th century. During the last years and the upcoming so called *digital age*, many discussions took place (also in the fields of school and higher education, learning for work and at workplaces as well as non-formal and informal learning) due to the two main changes covering all sectors, branches and levels of the society: first, globalisation and second, establishment of the worldwide internet. In our days, the European Commission has set a new milestone with its policy *Opening up Education* even though it focuses too much new technologies and Open Educational Resources (OERs) instead of new pedagogical methodologies and Open Educational Practices (OEPs).

What is E-Learning?

The term E-Learning is controversial and ambiguous from the beginning: Its introduction is often assigned to Jay Cross but it normally remains unclear for which abbreviation E-Learning stands for. Therefore the term Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) is more precise but could not become broadly accepted. E-Learning has existed and been promoted by many experts, professional providers and associations at national, European and international levels (such as EDEN in Europe and ICDE worldwide) for more than 20 years, but has not achieved the awareness and attention of a broad audience and society as a whole. The huge promises from the internet hype at the beginning of this millennium were not fulfilled as predicted: despite the continuous and slowly increasing success and implementations of E-Learning in enterprises, it was not recognized as a driver and enabler for innovation across all educational sectors. Meanwhile E-Learning is normal practice in larger enterprises (95% penetration in companies with more than 500 employees) but not yet widely accepted in other educational sectors.

Dimensions of Quality Development

We could conclude earlier (Stracke, 2015) that the (learning) quality is most important for learning, education and training. The debate on learning quality is very old, but discussions and theories on quality development in learning and education have only been started a few years ago. The concept and philosophy of holistic quality development with continuous improvement cycle was introduced in Japan first and could gain recognition, acceptance and implementations worldwide: A long-term debate has focussed the quality development in general regarding the different quality issues, aspects and approaches (cf. Deming, 1982; Juran, 1951 and 1992; and for an overview Stracke, 2006). In its broad sense it can be defined as “Quality development covers every kind of strategy, analysis, design, realisation, evaluation, and continuous improvement of the quality within given systems”. (Stracke, 2013; p.21). Thus, quality development can be described formally by the chosen scope. Quality is not a fixed characteristic belonging to subjects or systems but depends amongst others on the point of view and scope. The differentiation of the scope into the three quality dimensions Potential, Process and Result was introduced by Donabedian (1980) in the healthcare sector and has become widely accepted. These three quality dimensions are focusing the following questions

(cf. Donabedian, 1980; for the long-term debate on the quality issues, aspects and approaches cf. Deming, 1982 and 1986; Juran, 1951 and 1992; and Stracke, 2006):

1. Potential dimension: What are the potentials for the quality development in the future?
2. Process dimension: How can the processes be described and optimized for the purpose of quality development?
3. Result dimension: How can the quality development be supported regarding given results and systems?

Quality development requires a long process to be established and integrated throughout a whole organization and in particular the society. Once started, it has to become a continuous improvement circle to be finally successful (Crosby, 1980; Deming, 1986). Quality cannot be described and fixed by a simple definition, because in itself quality is too abstract to have any impact. Therefore, quality has to be defined and specified according to the given context and situation considering the perspectives of stakeholders involved (Donabedian, 1980). It is important to identify the relevant aspects and to specify the suitable criteria. It is necessary to find a consensus amongst the different views and perspectives to gain a common understanding of quality for the given context and situation due to different and sometimes contradictory needs and definitions of quality by all stakeholders (for detailed explanations on context determinations cf. Crosby, 1980; Deming, 1986; Donabedian, 1980).

The question is now: How can quality development be addressed and improved in learning, education and training in our times of the digital age? The concept of Open Education tries to provide a framework in theory and practice for the improvement of the learning quality through the integration of learning innovations leading to opening up the education. Therefore openness and Open Education are becoming not only more and more in vogue but also crucial: It is not a fashion but an increasing requirement due to the dramatic changes in societies.

Quality Dimensions for Open Education

We can transfer and apply the three generic quality dimensions that we have analysed above to learning, education and training in general and in particular to Open Education:

- Learning objectives: To address and exploit the full potential of future learning, education and training and to ensure its best quality development, the learning objectives have to be defined precisely: They have to meet the given situation and target group as the best quality always differs and is dependent on the circumstances and conditions. Sometimes a simple solution is meeting better the learning objectives and needs than a highly sophisticated learning opportunity.
- Learning realization: The learning realization is covering all processes in learning, education and training related to its quality development. That includes the definition of learning strategies as well as the design of learning, education and training and its

practical implementation, assessment and evaluation in courses and any other learning opportunities.

- Learning achievements: Learning achievements are the results of the realized learning opportunities, i.e., what the learners have learned. We have to underline that this dimension is very different in learning, education and training compared with other sectors: In learning, education and training, the achievements are not a result of a production or service process but are built and achieved by the learners themselves. Therefore the learning opportunities as products of learning providers cannot be judged objectively (like for travel services) but only individually for the specific given learning objectives. And in particular a learner can judge the quality of a learning opportunity only after its completion. Therefore the quality development in learning, education and training is more complex and difficult than in any other sector.

Figure 1 is illustrating the quality dimensions and their application to Open Education:



Figure 9. Quality dimensions in Open Education (Stracke, 2016)

MOOCs Are Dead! – Long Live the MOOCs?

The new term MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) has immediately attracted the masses even though it is just another label for a diversity of different online learning scenarios and methodologies that were already developed and implemented many years before. MOOCs can be considered and defined as a special type of E-Learning, raising a new interest and offering opportunities to (again) reach learners that are attracted by E-Learning solutions due to many reasons. Thus, MOOCs can be the enablers for a renaissance of E-Learning even though their completion rates are very low and their general quality is questionable and currently under lively debate. Nowadays, different types of MOOCs (so called cMOOCs and xMOOCs) are discussed but the focus is still on the masses, technology and promised innovations that are

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not easily to discover: Most MOOCs are lacking continuous tutoring and support for all learners who are expected to teach themselves. Not only the high drop-out rates have raised the question of quality for MOOCs and several international conferences (such as LINQ 2014) had a special focus on MOOCs. On the other hand MOOCs have prepared the future path for opening up education and currently the European initiative MOOQ for the quality of MOOCs has started to develop a common Quality Reference Framework for improving, assessing and comparing the quality of MOOCs.

Is Open Education the next revolution?

According to Marx, a revolution is the complete change of the production relations and means and their new ownership and direction towards changed production power. Transferred to Open Education, the current question is whether Open Education is indeed a social revolution for individual learners, educational institutions and the society worldwide or whether MOOCs as the most prominent appearance of open learning are only marketing instruments by the traditional educational systems. The presentation at the EDEN Conference 2016 will start the debate and following research will provide further argumentations for future discussions.

Conclusions

This article can only initiate the debate on the impact of Open Education and future research and publications are required to focus and provide more argumentations for further discussions.

We believe in education as a human right and public good and that learning and education have to be changed to keep this status due the major global challenges.

This overview of the quality and future of Open Education and MOOCs presented the needs and potential approaches to meet these requirements and how we can achieve higher learning quality by opening-up education and introducing open learning innovations. We presented current main movements for Open Education such as MOOQ and hope that much more initiatives in theory and practice will take place leading to an increasing recognition and realization of Open Education. As there are much more, we have started to collect them on the portal www.opening-up.education and invite all interested experts and practitioners to share expertise, further initiatives and experiences. We believe in the importance of Open Learning and Open Education for our future and the positive impact on our personal lives and developments as well as on all societies worldwide.

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