

Amy: But is it really cheap? Rumble (2001) highlights that something somewhere has to give - you either compromise quality to keep costs down or you retain quality but promote costs onto the learner.

MOOCs have the potential to be exceptionally powerful - the government pays Universities for knowledge dissemination and community engagement activities,

Stephen: As you say Amy, someone has to pay in somewhere and there is a constant fear of not making a return on that investment. Partially this is because of where they are looking for the return, of course.

*Dani: Thanks for the comments everyone, I will break my comments in some postings...*

*I am not so sure that high Education should be free, not even DE. Perhaps only from basic education up to vocational training – e.g. so people could become plumbers, electricians etc. There is often a real shortage of these skills in an economy. People who gain a degree end up with a relatively higher salary. Therefore, if they financially gain from studying at university, it is perhaps fair they pay part of the cost. If the government can guarantee equality of opportunity for everyone to get a decent job, then it is up to the individuals to invest time, effort and money for any 'economic betterment'. Besides, from what I see in my surroundings, when something is not free, it makes people value more. If people have to pay to go to university, you could argue that they would value the education more. MOOCs could be a solution for lifelong learning which is high in the EU agenda nowadays.*

*If DE is cheap?? I appreciate your point Amy, 'someone has to invest somewhere' (perhaps less in the future), and certainly it shouldn't be the plumber or the father of the 10 grade girl. It should be the ones that are in a better social position.*

*I also agree with Justin when he mentioned about the taxpayers. Definitely it wouldn't be nice to see that in the newspaper :D. In the other hand, you made me think about all the taxes I pay to UK and USA for buying things in Amazon, iTunes Store, etc. What about all the extra money online sales bring to these economies? A similar model could indeed be in the government agenda?*

Stephen K: Digital Ed will not solve all the problems and it's currently being used as a gimmick by the people apparently making the decisions.

*Hi Stephen K, thanks for your comments. I understand your points, 'Digital Ed will not solve all the problems and it's currently being used as a gimmick by the people apparently making the decisions'. This is more evident during elections...I saw it happens here in Uruguay with the introduction of the OLPC back in 2007. Nevertheless (and despite the fact that my non favour party implemented this project), I have to recognize the benefits and the direct opportunities this project has brought specially for lower classes. I am not sure that there are (already) concrete results in education, such as better score in the PISA test, but once and while there is in the news a history of a child from (literally "nowhere") receiving grants to study abroad because his/her computer project where selected by Google or other big companies in one of those ICT programmes for youth. BTW, you can see a little of the reality here on this interesting documentary for the 5 years of the CEIBAL Plan*

*(the OLPC project in Uruguay) made for the Austrian public television.*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxMLDZN77uo>

Hi John, good ideas to think...

1)...when you mentioned 'Maybe we can entice these folk to work in the rural areas?', agree, this should be the first and (the cheapest) approach for governments. In the other hand, the motivation of these teachers to leave the 'big city' might affect the quality of their classes. When I wrote that paragraph perhaps I was thinking more about the perspective of the student, getting the same class as a MIT student and living elsewhere, or myself, affording to be at home with my baby and studying in Edinburg at the same time...

2) Totally agree: 'I would suspect that much "homework" would have to be done before venturing into the distance education game in a developing country'.

3) I have to wonder what things are going to look like in 5 years. In 10 years? The field on mobile education is exciting and will have huge implications for the classroom and for developing countries. There's an app for everything these days

4) HE must adopt (or adapt) to the technology demanded by today's learners in order to remain a viable entity.

I spent 8 in Timor-Leste (a post conflict country which is one of the 48 least developed countries in the world) coordinating the introduction of ICTs in the Justice System with UNDP and after in the Ministry of Education with NZAid. Both projects faced multiple challenges additionally to the financial constrains. No network connectivity exists (not even telephones in the beginning) between government offices and departments, not to mention the schools conditions. Additionally, non-ICT challenges were probably even more prominent. Within administrative services a significant fraction of temporary employees are war veterans. In the education, most of the teachers without proven degrees became permanent staff during the post conflict (a doubting UN solution to establish peace during post conflict times is to re-establish education very fast). Their qualifications, if any, rarely matched with their posts, and the introduction of ICTs would frighten everyone. A straightforward approach to rectifying the problem was never really feasible, given their political influence. Anyways, when I handover the project to my counterparts, the success of the network was still questionable (poor data transfer speeds, inter alia, have discouraged parts of the project), but the ICT staff that were expected to transfer their acquired knowledge and skill to others could pursue a distance-learning programme from Indonesia (most of the Timorese people also speaks Bahasa Indonesian) whilst they remained in their functions within the government. This approach appeared to be the only sustainable and practical one. Overseas training founded by international aid was in many case disrupting local development.

Rory: There's a discussion to be had there about the pros and cons of aid, which could be useful for thinking about MOOCs (or at least the free MOOCs - MOOCs-for-profit are a different game, and maybe before too long will be the only game).

Stephen: I like itunes as a way to get music, occasionally. I prefer to buy CDs, it seems more 'real' to have the packaging and an actual item rather than just a file on an ipod. I will occasionally also buy a single track. The problem with this, from the point of view of musicians at least, is that when they put an album out, it's sequenced in a particular way for a purpose.

What you will also get with this version of online learning is a two tier system. The rich will get the real university experience, with the accrual of social and cultural capital it brings, and the contact with academics and other students with all of the benefits that sort of interaction has for learning and for developing networks. The poor will get a cheap copy - looking through the window of the university.

I'm not sure that e-learning, or any kind of learning, is going to solve the rich-poor gap on its own. Inequality is a systemic feature of capitalism. An education system that prepares people for the 'knowledge economy' is just feeding the monster.

How do you know if an online course is good or not?  
Free education is good or not?

**Education leaders must look forward and think creatively to make higher education relevant.**  
**education's affordability problem.**