



SCRIPT OF TALK

TITLE:

MOOC by Design:

What makes for a successful online learning experience - especially in a MOOC?

SPEAKER:

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NARRATION:

Online learning is becoming a primary instructional strategy for ICT-based open and distance learning in countries where Internet access is readily available. More and more educational institutions are offering online programs and courses. Most often, online courses are offered using a web-based delivery platform that employs a learning management system such as Moodle, Blackboard, or Canvas. You may know of other online learning platforms, too.

More recently courses that enroll large numbers of students have been offered using specialized technical platforms that are designed to support instruction at scale. These massively open online courses – MOOCs – have tended to be offered in variants of two recognizable styles, one format that supports knowledge transmission (xMOOC) and the other that supports knowledge construction and network-supported learning (cMOOC). The learning outcomes and content of a course is often a factor in the style chosen for the course delivery system. You can think about the kinds of courses that might lend themselves to one style or the other, or a hybrid variant of the x and cMOOC styles.

edX and Sakai are examples of open source technical platforms that are used to deliver MOOC-style courses. Coursera and Udacity take a similar approach to large-scale delivery using proprietary technical platforms of their own. Video has become a dominant content delivery strategy because of its ability to provide a face to compliment content and instruction – in an effort to connect with students. Well-known instructors whose reputations attract students to the courses often deliver these video lecture style xMOOCs.

But, no matter which technical platform is used for delivery or what style of instructions is intended, a big question remains for all participants in online courses - what makes a successful learning experience, and especially in a massively open online course.

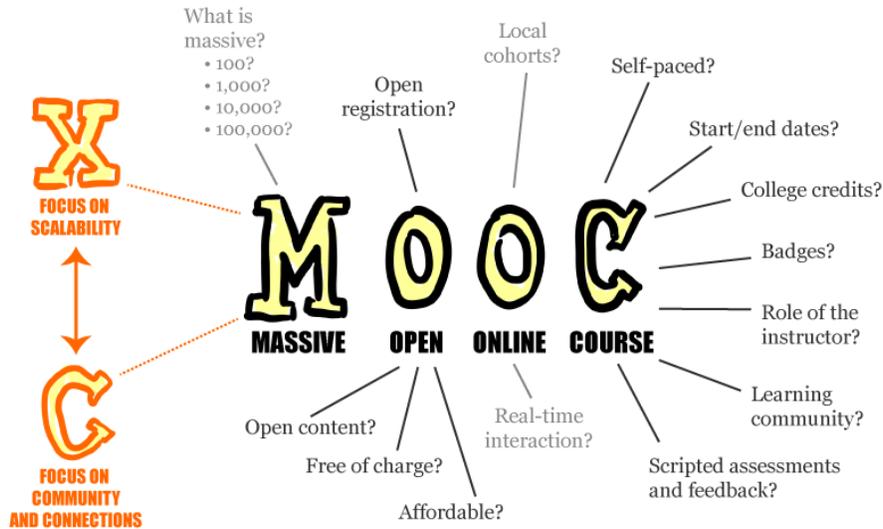


Image by Mathieu Plourde (2013).



I suggest that the characteristics that make a MOOC a successful learning experience would be similar to those that make any online course successful. We'll explore these characteristics. However, two clear differences are apparent with MOOCs that make them different from many other online courses: the audience for the course and the lack of formal credit associated with it are key differences. Can you think how these factors might affect the learning process, as well as the persistence and success of participants? You can explore these ideas in the online forums, too.

When we think about designing and delivering an online learning experience we often think first about the technical elements of course delivery: the platform, the content, the user experience, and the assessment systems. Let's take a look at each element...

1. **Delivery platform**

It is important that online learning is delivered through stable and robust delivery platforms. A learning management system is one style of delivery platform. The mooKIT used in this course is another. Each has its own particular attributes.

Whichever platform is selected, it should be easy to use and be accessible at any time. Users should be able to utilize their preferred devices to participate in course activities such as lectures, discussions, chats, quizzes or other interactive elements.

2. **Content**

Effective learning requires high quality content that meets the course requirements and end-user expectations.

Learners must be able to satisfy the question "What's in it for me?" for them to commit to the online environment. A positive answer to this question will help ensure acceptance of the format

and lead to engagement with the course and its activities. Individual will need to be motivated to persist in the online environment.

The content also needs to be the appropriate size for effective learning, and should have engaging media and activities associated with it to help clarify, actualize or reinforce the key instructional objectives.

3. **User experience**

Above all, the student experience needs to be engaging and invite ongoing participation in the course. Using different engagement practices throughout the course provides variety and an element of surprise that sometimes helps motivation and persistence. Nobody enjoys a steady diet of the same learning strategy repeated over multiple weeks. Variety and novelty are important elements of the user experience.

Courses that are optimized for use on mobile devices also present an opportunity for effective learning outside of formal learning spaces, when time permits, increasing the opportunities and motivation for fully-engaged learning throughout the course.

4. **Assessment and feedback**

Assessment systems within the course should present value for both students and instructors.

Students should be able to self-assess using informal quizzes that provide them with a sense of accomplishment or even a correction or a signal to further review course material or prepare for formal quizzes.

Formal assessments and ongoing user feedback can be employed to help course instructors and designers to gauge the level of learning taking place within the course, and to encourage them to implement improvements or changes that will lead to better user experience and improved learning.

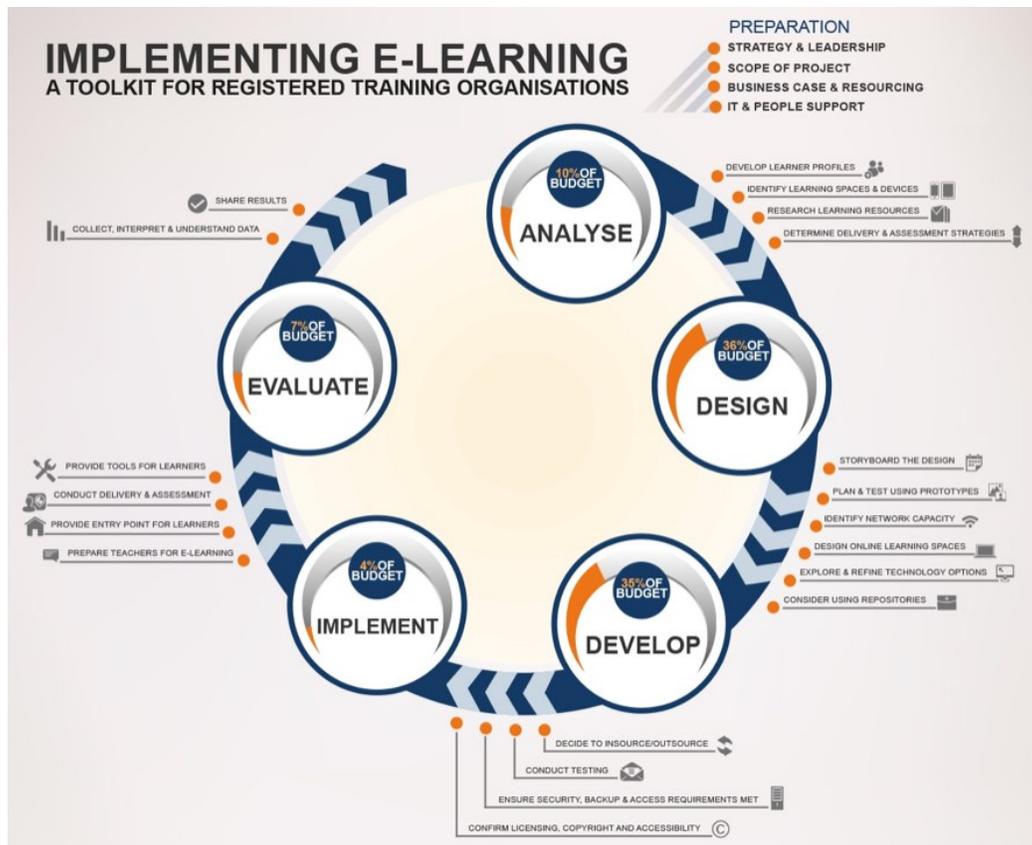
Assessment systems are important component of an iterative development process that builds in course improvements after each time the course is taught online.

How then do we begin to design good learning experiences in an online environment?

One approach is to use a formal instructional development process, or a variant of one that works within the context of your institutions.

When it comes to formalizing an instructional design for a MOOC, there are some established instructional development schemes that provide a clear process and value proposition. One particular model is often referenced as the ADDIE model.

ADDIE is an acronym and it has five stages: Analyse, design, develop, implement, and evaluate. It is a well-known approach that provides solid foundation for any instructional development process, including the design implementation and evaluation of a MOOC.



Implementing e-learning toolkit by Commonwealth of Australia National VET E-learning Strategy is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia License.

The Creative Commons-licensed diagram from the Australian National VET Strategy provides an overview of the ADDIE process. Note that it is a cyclical process for iterative improvement of instructional systems. At its core, ADDIE is a design-based process that uses feedback obtained during each iteration of the development and implementation cycle to identify specific instructional strategies, content or media that require improvement or change.

The ADDIE process provides a clear methodology for online learning and MOOC designers who wish to implement an online course, and who realize that they will likely not perfect their process in a single iteration of a course. It is a realistic approach to instructional development.

And, while it is also possible to take a less formal and more agile approach to development using the ADDIE principles to continuously improve instruction, it is important to realize that in today's world, everything is permanently beta, and improvements or enhancements to media or delivery system may be right around the corner.