

Book review of *MOOCs and Their Afterlives*

Losh, E. (ed.). (2017). *MOOCs and Their Afterlives: Experiments in Scale and Access in Higher Education*. University of Chicago Press. 384 pages. ISBN: 978-0226469454.

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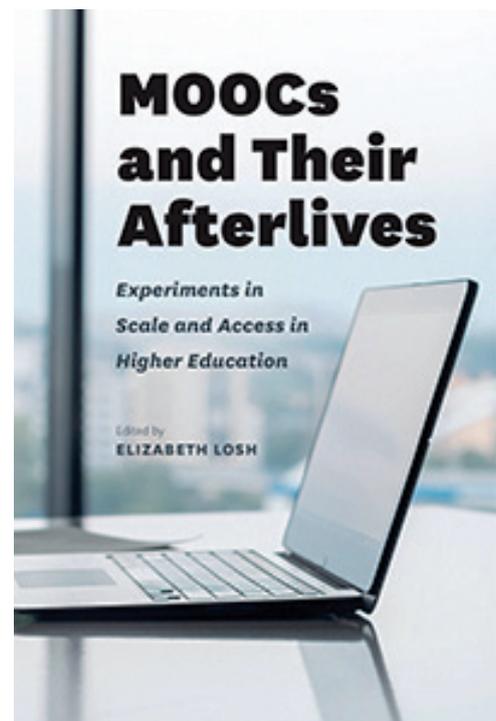
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What was once known as open and distance learning is now almost entirely incorporated into the conceptual framework of massive open online courses (MOOCs). It is well known that MOOCs are not always courses, nor always open, nor always massive. There are a wide variety of MOOCs, making it difficult to establish a clear definition according to course type. Nevertheless, MOOCs currently serve as a frame of reference for discussing digital education. This book attempts to enlighten the reader about the MOOC phenomenon by carrying out a rigorous exploration of this conceptual and applied amalgam. The aim of this book is to carry out a review of the experimental work carried out in the field of digital learning. The information included should assist the reader in identifying what are known as the “afterlives of the MOOCs”.

The editor’s main achievement was to categorize cases and experiences according to theme. The chapters found in “Part 1: Data Driven Education” focus on issues of scale. Scale has historically been a significant challenge for open & online learning experiences. In the early years of distance education, scale was considered to be double advantageous. First, distance courses initiatives facilitated access to learning, mainly in higher education, to a greater number of people. And also, the scalable organizational methodologies simplified course management and institutional logistics through incremental processes that could respond to the demands of a growing number of enrolled students. These two approaches now add a new one, related to the management —also “scalable”— of the data generated in digital learning practices. Here too, the scale functions in two directions. On the one hand, information analytics facilitates the provision of personalized learning services to large and heterogeneous groups of students. On the other hand, by receiving direct attention, smaller groups of students can benefit from knowing about behaviour patterns that have been elucidated through data science techniques. This section may be of interest to designers of institutional courses for large groups of students (xMOOCs?) and instructional design professionals.

The chapters in “Part 2: Connected Learning” cover connected learning experiences and delve into the learning theories that are applied in the design of MOOCs. There are varying approaches to “connectivity” in the different education theories. One approach gives rise to “connectivist” MOOCs, which are based on Connectivism Theory. Some courses, however, are based on Connected



Learning. These rely on peer collaboration, are guided by student interest, and are open to a network of community actors. Examples of both approaches can be found in this section.

“Part 3: Openness and Critical Pedagogy” covers alternative theoretical approaches that give rise to practices that have a cross-conceptual basis. This cross-conceptual approach is observed in the case of feminist and critical theories, which encourage the creation of peer communities that reject the figure of the professor/instructor and seek alternatives to the traditional banking and industrial models of knowledge dissemination that are characteristic of conventional digital distance learning environments. Cross-conceptual approaches are also seen in theories that are centred on opening up the didactic process and community participation in course development.

The book ends with “Part 4: The Pathos of the MOOC Moment” and “Part 5: MOOC Critiques”. These sections deal with some of the problematic aspects of the emergent field of MOOCs from a variety of perspectives. Some of the subjects covered are: the perceived paternalism associated with the digital universalization of education, the paradoxical feelings students have of isolation versus companionship when studying in digital spaces, and the externalization of education, which can lead to the platforms and data falling into the hands of profit-seeking corporations. The subjects covered in this section are quite diverse, perhaps too diverse.

In summary, this book reflects the current state of MOOCs, their doctrines, their potential, and the questions they precipitate. This text will be especially interesting for education professionals interested in designing and participating in an open online course. This book should also interest educational institution administrators that want to expand their field of action into the terrain of the Internet or who want to innovate online experiences that are already in place. The principal value of this book is that it allows the reader to understand the current reality of open and distance learning, a reality that has already gone beyond MOOCs.