Is Open Education a revolution or are MOOCs only marketing instruments?

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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 proposed presentation at OE Global 2016 will start the debate and the full paper will provide further argumentations for future discussions.

Keywords: Open Education, MOOCs, e-Learning, revolution, marketing

1 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.

2 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 large enterprises (95% penetration in companies with more than 500 employees) but not yet widely accepted in other educational sectors.

3 What are 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 not easily to discover: Most MOOCs are lacking continuous tutoring and support for all learners who are expected to teach themselves. Only this year 2014, the international EIF / LINQ Conference has raised the question of quality for opening up education with a special focus on MOOCs for the first time.

4 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 on new technologies and Open Educational Resources (OERs) instead of new pedagogical methodologies and Open Educational Practices (OEPs).

5 Is Open Education a 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 proposed presentation at OE Global 2016 will start the debate and the full paper will provide further arguments for future discussions.

References


ICORE: www.ICORE-online.org


