

DeTao Masters Academy

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MOOCs: Opportunities and Challenges

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Introduction

It is a pleasure to address this conference on *The Internet and Education* again. My subject is *MOOCs: Opportunities and Challenges*. I shall make six points, flagging three opportunities and three challenges.

My own experience of MOOCs is mainly as a student - which may be the most relevant kind of experience.

I have taken 12 MOOCs as a student already and I will start a new MOOC this week called *Mindfulness and Wellbeing for Peak Performance*. It is from Monash University in Australia. I will mention my experience as a MOOC student as I explore the opportunities and challenges that they present. First, let's explore the opportunities.

Opportunity 1: Serving Many New Students

A MOOC is a Massive Open Online Course. There are over 4,000 of them being offered around the world and so the four letters M - O - O - C can mean different things in different places.

But in most cases they are still **massive**, meaning that they enrol large numbers of students: thousands, tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands.

Most are also still **open**, which means two things: they are free and anyone can register.

They are all **online**, so if you are connected anywhere in the world you can follow lots of MOOCs.

Are they **courses**? It depends what you mean by that word. Most do not carry formal assessment leading to credit for degrees, but some give certificates of participation. However, most people study MOOCs because they want to learn about the subject and think it will be useful in their lives.

So Opportunity Number One is to reach many new students. Once DeTao offers MOOCs tens of thousands of people all over the world will get to know DeTao and could learn about some exciting topics from our many expert Masters.

The best way that I can illustrate this opportunity is through my own experience. I have taken 12 MOOCs, listed here.

- The Mind is Flat (Warwick University - UK)
- Talk the Talk (Open University - UK)
- Start Writing Fiction (Open University - UK)
- Challenging Wealth and Income Inequality (Open University - UK)
- Childhood in the Digital Age (Open University - UK)
- What is a Mind? (University of Cape Town - South Africa)
- Empire: The Controversies of British Imperialism (Exeter University - UK)
- Logical and Critical Thinking (University of Auckland - New Zealand)
- Exploring English: Magna Carta (British Council - UK)
- Basic Science: Understanding Numbers (Open University - UK)
- Strategies for Successful Ageing (Trinity College Dublin - Ireland)
- Mindfulness & Wellbeing for Peak Performance (Monash University - Australia)

There are all from universities in the FutureLearn consortium, which has the best MOOC platform and very high quality standards.

I am truly delighted that DeTao has joined FutureLearn. You can see that I have studied MOOCs from different universities in five countries. I look forward to adding DeTao and China to the list.

So far I have studied MOOCs on a variety of subjects: History, Logic, Ageing, Psychology, Economics, Literature, Mathematics and Public Speaking. My latest course, on *Mindfulness and Wellbeing for Peak Performance* starts this week. This illustrates the flexibility of MOOCs. This MOOC comes from Australia, I live in Vancouver but I am starting the MOOC here in China and will continue studying it during travels in Europe.

Once DeTao has produced its MOOCs in *Daoism* and *Leadership Thinking* I look forward to taking them. Offering MOOCs is a chance for DeTao to attract eager learners from global pool of people like me.

Opportunity 2: Giving the Masters Greater Reach

The second opportunity that DeTao would get from offering MOOCs is to bring the work and expertise of its Masters to a large global audience.

Our De Tao Masters are all very well known in their disciplines and professions, but MOOCs can make them famous with a wider public. This is good for them and good for DeTao. Most people who teach a MOOC find it a challenging process because they have to simplify their subject and present it very clearly. But nearly all of them say that the experience of teaching a MOOC makes them better teachers in the classroom afterwards.

Opportunity 3: Attracting New Masters and Students to DeTao

The third opportunity is to attract new Masters and new students to DeTao's other courses and projects. Many universities use MOOCs to attract students to more specialised courses for which they have to pay. These courses may be online or onsite. Also when

experts around the world see a DeTao Master giving a MOOC they might become interested in joining DeTao themselves.

Those are three opportunities. What about the challenges?

Challenge 1: Creating a good MOOC

The first challenge, obviously, is to create a good MOOC. This means, first, choosing a topic. It does not have to be a topic where there are no other MOOCs on offer, but it should be one in which DeTao has special expertise through a Master who is enthusiastic about offering a MOOC.

You then need to create a team around this Master. Remember that a MOOC is like an iceberg. The most visible part is the short videos presented by one or more of the experts, but they need to be backed by quite a large team. You need a video crew, you need people to prepare tests and quizzes and you need a group, which may be quite large if you have thousands of registrations, to monitor the exchanges between learners on social media and provide summaries from time to time.

Challenge 2: Bringing in Revenue

Challenge number two is to generate some revenue or offset the costs of the MOOC. The cost of making and offering a MOOC varies greatly, but for most it falls between \$50,000 and \$250,000. Institutions that produce just one or two MOOCs for publicity purposes may simply treat this as a marketing cost. But if DeTao intends to produce a series of MOOCs it needs to offset at least some of the costs by generating revenue. There are three main ways of doing this.

The first is to issue certificates of participation or completion for which people pay. FutureLearn sells far more of these than it expected to sell when it did its business plan.

The second income earner is to attract MOOC learners to other DeTao courses or workshops for which they will pay. The UK Open University calculates that it earns a return of 8% on its investment in freely available materials like MOOCs through people who then enrol as regular students.

The third income earner is to sell things on the MOOC site. My current MOOC on *Mindfulness* markets various books and CDs on the course website.

Challenge 3: Sustainability and Development

The final challenge is to continue to offer the MOOC at regular intervals. The first offering of any MOOC is very exciting for everyone involved, but by the time you get to the third offering some of the support team may be getting slightly bored with it.

Moreover subjects change, and the experts and team members will want to update the MOOC to include new developments and also to respond to weaknesses revealed by feedback received during its first offering. Normally people will be less motivated to

invest effort in the repeat offerings of the MOOC if it is not generating funds for the institution.

Conclusion

I have outlined briefly three opportunities and three challenges that MOOCs present to institutions that offer them.

I am delighted that DeTao is going to experiment with MOOCs with FutureLearn. DeTao's unique team of Masters gives it expertise in a great range of specialist fields that are of interest to millions of people around the world. A successful series of MOOCs would really put DeTao on the map!

Thank you