Chapter 8
What is Best for the Learner?
Are MOOCs the Answer?

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ABSTRACT
Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs are increasing in use by universities, corporations and other organizations. The quality of instruction and learning is an ongoing topic of debate as to whether MOOCs are effective for learning. What is best for the learner is determined by multiple factors. This chapter looks at what is best for the learner and whether MOOCs are the answer. The authors examine each of the factors that impact what is best for the learner. Each of the factors (accessibility, cost to the learner, quality of instructional design, learner performance, and acquiring on-line collaboration methods and resources) are described and are followed by a discussion of the issues, controversies and problems associated with each factor. This chapter takes up the discussion on the book section ‘RIA and education practice of MOOCs,’ with the particular focus on the topic of ‘educational training design.’

INTRODUCTION
Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs are increasingly becoming more prevalent as a tool for learning. In the wake of the increasing number of MOOCs, there are many issues surrounding their value to the learner and whether they do more harm than good. The initial MOOCs were launched with the intent of serving the needs of learners. MOOCs are viewed by some as bringing education in synch with the ubiquitous internet by providing continuous, anytime-anywhere access at no cost. Many cite the high number of drop outs from courses as an indicator that MOOCs are not beneficial to the learner in spite of the fact that more students may be served overall as contrasted to the expected on site enrollment capacity. For the student who was unable to complete a course, the MOOC may not be viewed as a positive learning experience. Although the most significant development and use of MOOCs is currently higher education, the corporate sector is growing and has been showing a higher completion rate. Some companies are leveraging existing MOOCs
What is Best for the Learner?

Figure 1. MOOCs and factors that impact what is best for the learner

![Diagram showing MOOCs and factors that impact what is best for the learner]

... to educate their customers, to identify, develop and recruit scarce talent and to provide training opportunities for their technology professionals.

Determining what is best for the learner is not straightforward. The concept of what is best for the learner can be defined and viewed in a number of different ways. In this chapter, we will first provide a brief background and context for looking at MOOCs from the learner’s perspective. We will identify and examine the different factors that go into determining what is best for the learner.

These factors include: accessibility, cost to the learner, quality of instructional design, learner performance, and acquiring on-line collaboration methods and resources currently used in today’s workplace. For each factor, we will identify and discuss the issues, controversies and problems surrounding that factor. We will offer solutions and recommendations for improving MOOCs from a learner’s perspective. We will offer recommendations for further research to address areas where data or strategies are lacking. Finally we will share our conclusion to the questions: What is best for the learner? Are MOOCs the answer?

BACKGROUND

The emergence of the internet and World Wide Web (WWW) impacted how we live and how we learn. Learning is a process of ACTIVE engagement with experience. It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world. It may involve an increase in skills, knowledge, understanding, values and the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and a desire to learn more. Learning is not always tied directly to pursuit of a degree or certification although many learners seek degrees and certi-
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