Editorial

Editorial: Horizon Report 2014 and Current Status of E-Learning

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Abstract

Emerging technologies are only valuable for today's learners, if instructors make smart pedagogical choices and apply technology in the context of effective teaching practices.

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As we finalize our second issue of 2014, two recent publications have caught our attention. The first is the 2014 edition of the New Media Consortium Horizon Report for higher education. This popular report provides a detailed analysis of emerging educational technologies and their impact on teaching and learning. Since its launch in 2002, the NMC Horizon Report has had many fans and critics (including us), but it continues to inspire many educational technologists.

Our main critique of the NMC Horizon Report is twofold: first, we would expect to see better connection and continuation among so-called emerging technologies from one year to another; second, we would like to see better linkages established between various pedagogical models and frameworks and emerging technologies. In this year's edition of the NMC Horizon Report, we were pleased to see our second wish finally becoming a reality.

The 2014 Higher Education Edition of the NMC Horizon Report is structured around three main topic areas:

1. Key trends accelerating higher education adoption (fast trends; mid-range trends and long-range trends).

2. Significant challenges impeding higher education technology adoption (solvable challenges; difficult challenges and wicked challenges).

3. Important developments in Educational Technology for higher education (time-to-adoption horizon: one year or less, two to three years and four to five years).

This model brings together a wide range of concepts related to the use and integration of digital technologies. As such, it is valuable for framing the issues surrounding online learning, social media, faculty's digital fluency, access, etc. We believe this will lead to a more complete and accurate picture of learning and teaching with emerging technologies.

Emerging technologies are only valuable for today's learners, if instructors make smart pedagogical choices and apply technology in the context of effective teaching practices. Which is why we are also intrigued by Steve Kolwich's blog post "5 Things Researchers Have Discovered About MOOCs". Kolwich (2014b) summarizes five preliminary reports from the MOOC Research Initiative. These reports suggest that Massive Open Online Courses might be a useful framework for extending college-level educational opportunities but much is still not known and further research is required.

Although MOOCs are not a fundamentally new mode of instruction and learning --the acronym is now over six years old (Cormier, 2008), it is clear they have not yet attained the transformative role their supporters originally envisioned (Carey, 2011) nor are they "dead" as some of their detractors have suggested (Schank, 2014). Rather, we are starting in the direction of serious research into when, how and in what contexts MOOCs are an effective application of educational technology. In the framework provided by the 2014 NMC Horizon report, they are one of the "difficult" challenges (Johnson, et al. 2014).

The course ahead remains uncharted. Whether MOOCs will disappear into conventional online higher education (Kolowich, 2014a), collapse into a "usefully middlebrow" media channel for popularizing scholarship (Freedman, 2013) or evolve into a transformative model for a future mode of higher education is not yet known. Our own efforts, whether in the form of research, or working to apply effective practices in online teaching will make the difference.

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