

## THREE

# Opening education and linking it to community

‘We were on the front pages of newspapers and magazines, and at the same time I was realizing ... we have a lousy product’, revealed Sebastian Thrun, founder of Udacity (for-profit US educational organization), in 2013 (Chafkin, 2013). Just a year before that, Thrun had been leading the so-called ‘MOOC revolution’ with his venture capital-funded platform of massive open online courses (MOOCs), and predicting ‘that in the future there will be 10 universities and Udacity will be one of them’ (Tamburri, 2014).

In the fall of 2011, Stanford University – where Thrun taught – opened some of its computer science courses to the world through an online platform and found hundreds of thousands of students enrolling. The size of this response prompted Thrun to resign from his tenured position at Stanford and start Udacity as a company that would partner with colleges and universities to provide online courses, eventually replacing them as an education provider. Thrun’s Udacity, and the millions he got in venture capital to launch it, quickly moved MOOCs from a niche discussion among educational technologists to the forefront of the conversation about transforming higher education (Clark, 2012).

The term ‘MOOC’ first emerged in 2008 (Cormier and Siemens, 2010) and four years later, the *New York Times* proclaimed 2012 ‘the year of the MOOC’ (Pappano, 2012). There was no shortage of hyperbole about MOOCs that year, including *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman’s suggestion that ‘nothing has more potential to enable us to reimagine higher education than the massive open online course, or MOOC’ (Friedman, 2013). So it was newsworthy when Thrun’s Udacity, by then one of several start-ups in the MOOC-provider business, failed at San Jose State University.

## Udacity's failed experiment in opening education

Thrun had promised that his work with San Jose State could 'change the life of Californians' by expanding access and lowering costs to college. Yet, after a semester in an online Udacity course, developed jointly with San Jose State faculty, students enrolled in the course did not fare as well as students who attended conventional classes with face-to-face instruction (Rivard, 2013). To explain Udacity's failed experiment at San Jose State University, Thrun said: 'These were students from difficult neighborhoods, without good access to computers, and with all kinds of challenges in their lives. It's a group for which this medium is not a good fit' (Chafkin, 2013). Although Thrun was quick to blame the students for the poor outcomes from Udacity's MOOC, there is ample research that finds no significant differences between online and face-to-face student achievement, and some conclude that online methods may lead to stronger learning outcomes (Koory, 2003; Bernard et al, 2004; Warren and Holloman, 2005; Fortune et al, 2006; Tallent-Runnels et al, 2006; Herman et al, 2007; Weber and Lennon, 2007; Dell et al, 2010; Means et al, 2010). This was also about the same time that Thrun was realizing 'we have a lousy product'.

MOOCs like the ones at Udacity are designed to work well for people who are already skilled at learning. One study of over 34,000 people enrolled in a Coursera MOOC found that 80% of them were people who already have college degrees; 44% had some graduate education (Christensen et al, 2013). This finding, and that the Udacity course failed to help students learn, comes as no surprise to those familiar with online instructional design. One of the key pedagogical variables that make an online course effective for students is time to interact with the instructor (Dell et al, 2010). MOOCs like the ones at Udacity, with video-delivered lectures to hundreds of thousands of students, and tests graded automatically by an army of teaching assistants, simply cannot enable one-on-one exchanges with the professor. Those interactions are the most important part of teaching and learning, and they simply do not scale.

The results of Udacity's endeavor at San Jose State should also come as no surprise to those familiar with education and inequality. Students who have gone to poorly funded elementary, middle and high schools get to college with an educational debt that has accumulated over time (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The fact that poor students may do less well in a MOOC that was not designed with them in mind is an extension of a systematic plunder of resources from their neighborhoods, schools,

and countries of origin. Reflecting on what happened at San Jose State, Tressie McMillan Cottom, a sociologist who researches higher education, says, ‘That’s a consequence of an unequal, under-funded K-12 system.<sup>1</sup> You can’t wall it off. Eventually you have to deal with it’ (Cottom, 2013).

In light of Udacity’s failure to ‘transform the lives of Californians’ at San Jose State University, Thrun announced that his company would pivot away from collaborating with universities and focus instead on corporate training ‘working outside the world of college’ (Chafkin, 2013). While many in academia cheered Thrun’s departure from the world of colleges and universities, education writer Audrey Watters cautioned against unfettered glee. We should, Watters contends, be concerned that the bad pedagogy of MOOCs, characterized by ‘short videos, multiple choice quizzes and robo-graders’ is bad for all learners, not just those enrolled in colleges (Watters, 2013). Why should these pedagogical practices be acceptable for anyone, she wonders: ‘Udacity’s move may simply re-inscribe an education pipeline that filters out rather than opening access and supporting more people’ (Watters, 2013). In other words, if those bad pedagogical practices become acceptable for some who already have educational advantages and all the other advantages that contribute to their place in corporate training rooms, this limits, rather than opens, access to learning. Opening access to learning is what the hype about MOOCs was originally all about – opening learning as widely as possible and connecting learners to one another.

## **Why openness matters**

‘Openness is critical to pre-Udacity rhetoric about MOOCs – it’s striking how that’s disappeared’, said writer Aaron Bady at a forum about online education (Cottom, 2013). The original concept that drove the development of the first MOOC, created by Dave Cormier and George Siemens who coined the term, was a desire to open education, to foster community, and to build connections between learners that would continue after the course (Cormier and Siemens, 2010). The experiments in sharing the content of college courses that came before theirs, such as the OpenCourseWare (OCW) initiative at MIT, convinced Cormier and Siemens that content by itself was not enough to be transformative to higher education in any meaningful way. The true benefit of the academy is the interaction, the negotiation of knowledge, and the debate (Cormier and Siemens, 2010). Higher

education at its best is an introduction to a life of the mind through contact with scholars who are engaged in the world of ideas. Being a scholar in the digital era brings the potential for more openness about what it means to be engaged in the world of ideas. One way of doing that is through opening our approach to education. There are many ways to open education, and digital technologies are facilitating this.

Increasingly, academics are sharing their strategies, resources, and struggles about teaching with others as they tweet and blog about their experiences in the classroom (Cormier and Siemens, 2010; Stommel, 2012). These digital practices are changing the structure of habits that surround teaching in a networked environment. In such environments, scholars move from discussions about their research to asking for resources to use in an upcoming class, much like academics have always done in conversations with colleagues down the hall at their own institution or at academic conferences. The difference that the digital makes is that it connects scholars at different institutions in geographically disparate locations, and amplifies those discussions in such a way that publics beyond the academic colleague down the hall can participate in them.

Opening education can also mean a different approach to curricula; moving away from standard class structures toward a participatory approach to curricula that encourages lifelong learning (Cormier and Siemens, 2010). There is a long tradition of participatory, learner-centered education that is intended to equip students with the skills and insights to challenge the power dynamics built into curricula, teacher–student interactions, and the educational, political, and social context in which they exist (Freire, 1970; Noguera, 2003; Davidson and Goldberg, 2010; Gardner, 2011). Opening curricula to a student-centered approach can happen without the benefit of digital technologies, but these can make it easier. For example, when performance and theatre scholar Kalle Westerling was teaching a public speaking class, he made the syllabus a collaborative document. The students in the class could comment on the syllabus and he could edit it. To begin each class session, he projected the shared document, and simultaneously, the students were also logged into the document. This made a difference in the class interaction. Students organized to propose changes to the syllabus. Westerling reports, ‘It seemed that this made students pay attention to the syllabus in a different way than in any other class that I’ve ever taught’ (Westerling, 2016).

Openness also means a shift in the role of the professor in the classroom. Rather than the ‘sage on the stage’ legacy model of a college classroom, a shift to a more open approach moves the instructor to

a ‘guide at the side’ (King, 1993). As with opening curricula, this is certainly possible in a completely analog environment, but it is made much easier with digital technologies. When teaching within a digitally networked environment, being a ‘guide at the side’ makes more sense, as learners often have access to the same source materials (for example online databases of journal articles) as the professors. This shift is more crucial in a digitally networked environment, because it enables learning as participatory rather than transmission-based (Stewart, 2013). In a participatory course, whether entirely online, face-to-face or a hybrid of both, the professor guides students by filtering and curating information, while facilitating discussion and interaction (Cormier and Siemens, 2010, fig. 3.1). Through this more open educational process, being a scholar in the digital era includes more open approaches to teaching, curricula, and engagement with students.

It is in the opening of education that the transformative potential of MOOCs resides. ‘If MOOCs are just free, open courses, then they’re a public good’, observes Aaron Bady (Cottom, 2013). However, most MOOCs restrict their course materials to paying customers – or at least, registered users. Even if users do not pay an upfront fee to enroll in a MOOC, the start-ups are harvesting registration data to monetize later. MOOCs like the ones Thrun created at Udacity are not ‘open’ by any meaningful definition of that word (Otte, 2012). Indeed, the typical MOOC is both enclosed and monetized (Straumshein, 2016).

## **The enclosure and commercialization of MOOCs**

It is the much-hyped and well-financed MOOC platforms such as Udacity, Coursera, and edX that have received the most attention, and it is this model to which most people refer when they discuss MOOCs. The partnerships between Elsevier and edX (Elsevier, 2013) and between Coursera and Chegg, consolidating textbooks by Cengage Learning, Macmillan Higher Education, Oxford University Press, SAGE, and Wiley (Doyle, 2013), point to educational enclosure rather than openness (Watters, 2013). The MOOC models currently amount to a shaded variation on legacy models of scholarly publishing, in which colleges and universities pay for access to licensed academic content for a finite and regulated audience of readers.

## **Of widgets and blueberries: MOOCs and ‘productivity’ in higher education**

Being a scholar in the digital age, or any other, means creating knowledge. Ask any scholar what ‘being productive’ means to them and they will likely think of the papers they delivered at conferences, or the articles and books they have published. But ask almost any administrator in higher education what the term ‘productivity’ means, and you may get a very different answer. William G. Bowen, former president of Princeton University and the Andrew Mellon Foundation, has much to say about productivity in his book *Higher education in the digital age* (Bowen, 2015). In defining the term, Bowen writes, ‘productivity is the ratio of outputs to the inputs used to produce them’. Acknowledging that this definition is not very helpful, he continues:

[B]ut this formulation conceals at least as much as it reveals, since it is maddeningly difficult in the field of education to measure both outputs and inputs – even within a single institution, never mind across institutions serving different missions. If only we produced standardized widgets or harvested blueberries! (Bowen, 2015, p. 2)

Bowen’s lament here, which seems partly meant in jest, could be the howl of administrators in higher education everywhere. The dilemma of how to measure productivity, according to Bowen, is part of a larger problem he refers to as ‘cost disease’ (Bowen, 2015, p. 2). The basic idea behind this is relatively simple, writes Bowen: ‘in labor-intensive industries such as the performing arts and education, there is less opportunity than in other sectors’ – presumably making widgets or harvesting blueberries – ‘to increase productivity by substituting capital for labor’ (Bowen, 2015, p. 3). In other words, it is much harder to use capital investments to replace workers, as you might if your business was harvesting blueberries. As the hypothetical blueberry business owner, if your goal was to maximize profits rather than provide jobs, you could invest in a blueberry-harvesting machine to replace the human blueberry pickers. If only higher education were not a ‘labor-intensive industry’, then administrators could increase productivity.

For administrators like Bowen, productivity means outputs measured in the number of credentialed students<sup>2</sup> with degrees turned out by the university in the shortest possible time-to-degree, rather than in blueberries harvested or widgets produced. With this context of ‘cost disease’, Bowen goes on to discuss the ‘prospects for using new

technologies to address the productivity, cost and affordability issues' in higher education (Bowen, 2015, p. 43). This plainly states where digital technologies are situated for most administrators. MOOCs are viewed as a technological solution to the problems created by austerity politics that have systematically underfunded higher education over the last 30 years. Bowen, to his credit, sees the potential of MOOCs but remains circumspect about their ability to address these issues. He writes:

It seems clear that MOOCs have an extraordinary capacity to improve access to educational materials from renowned instructors in various subjects for learners throughout the world. However, as far as I am aware, right now there is no compelling evidence as to how well MOOCs can produce learning outcomes for 18-to-22-year-olds of various backgrounds studying on mainline campuses. (Bowen, 2015, pp. 60–1)

But others are less reserved in their enthusiasm for MOOCs as a solution to what ails higher education.

In his book *Revolution in higher education*, Richard DeMillo unabashedly trumpets his enthusiasm for technology to make college affordable and accessible for a wide swath of the population (DeMillo, 2015). It is this kind of massively scaled teaching online, led by a 'small band of innovators', that will make the revolution of affordable and accessible higher education possible, according to DeMillo. In a section in his book called 'Is a university a business?', DeMillo seems to pose a question, but the only answer for him is 'yes, of course'. DeMillo has already answered his own question a few pages earlier under the subheading, 'Higher education is an Internet business'. For DeMillo, the problem of the current university structure is scale: 'one professor, teaching several large lectures, with the help of a small army of teaching assistants, can touch at most a thousand students at a time' (DeMillo, 2015, p. 123). This is not nearly productive enough, according to DeMillo. The problem he identifies is the same as Bowen: 'cost disease'. In other words, the labor-intensive aspect of education is a problem that the Internet's ability to scale up can solve. For DeMillo, the main problem with higher education today is 'cost' and the solution is 'increasing productivity' through massive scaling up of courses.

To scale up to massive levels, DeMillo predicts the 'rise of the super professor' (DeMillo, 2015, p. 123). Thus with 'five teams like this' – of a super professor and several armies (not just one army) of teaching assistants – 'we can teach five hundred thousand students' (DeMillo,

2015, p. 126). This is precisely the kind of change he has led at his own institution, Georgia Tech University, where he is the Director of the Center for 21st Century Universities. DeMillo partnered with AT&T and Udacity to create a computer science degree that is entirely online and offered at a lower cost to students, around \$7,000, due to the corporate underwriting of the degree (Onink, 2013).<sup>3</sup> ‘Exactly this kind of team approach was used in planning the Georgia Tech online master’s degree. Two additional faculty members were needed to manage an increase of nearly nine thousand students’ (DeMillo, 2015, p. 126).

In this view of the ‘multiversity’, the faculty are managers, processing students through the knowledge factory. The ratio of two faculty to nine thousand students is the sort of increased ‘productivity’ that administrators want to see realized in the academy through the use of digital technologies. But this runs counter to decades of research on the importance of engagement between students and professors (Picciano, 2002; Umbach and Wawrzynski, 2005; Wise et al, 2004). It also runs counter to the kind of pedagogy that teaches students to question and challenge the educational, political, and social context in which they find themselves (Freire, 1970; Noguera, 2003). For DeMillo, the only thing that is standing in the way of this revolution: faculty. ‘The (MOOC) Revolution is an assault on the Ivory Tower – and its noblest ideas like scholarship, tenure + academic freedom that must be defended at all costs by holy warriors’, writes DeMillo (2015, p. 223). The ‘holy warriors’ here are faculty, the ones defending scholarship, tenure, and academic freedom.

Leaving aside for now the important issues of tenure and academic freedom, given the focus of this volume, we want to consider for a moment what DeMillo has against scholarship. In his chapter on ‘Brands’ (Chapter 10), he writes a lot about football at colleges and universities, specifically the Sandusky sex abuse scandal at Penn State.<sup>4</sup> He uses this example to make the point that even though Sandusky’s conviction on multiple accounts of sexually assaulting children in his care was damaging to Penn State’s brand, the institution was able to recover because football is not the primary value of the Penn State brand. Its primary value is credentialing students. Scholarship is like football in DeMillo’s conceptualization of higher education. DeMillo quotes Ben Nelson of the Minerva Project (a for-profit educational start-up), to explain it: ‘If a student pays tuition, you can’t say “Thanks for the money. I will now use it for something you don’t want, like football or research.” If you do that, your brand suffers and you eventually lose in the marketplace’ (DeMillo, 2015, p. 221).

Faculty who insist on the importance of research and scholarship are damaging the brand of colleges and universities, by taking time, attention, and resources away from what should be their core, perhaps sole, function: teaching. Scholarship, like football, is a distraction from the main brand of teaching and credentialing, which are the keys to winning the marketplace, in DeMillo's view. The faculty, the 'holy warriors' according to DeMillo, are defending an old view of the university where scholarship, tenure, and academic freedom matter and digital technology does not. In opposition to these 'holy warriors' are the 'small band of innovators' – like Thrun and others – who are rethinking the university. In this view, the 'innovators' are aligned with the corporatist goals of credentialing as many students as quickly as possible. What DeMillo does not condone are the faculty (and students) who use digital technologies to engage in activism that challenges university administration.

DeMillo asserts that while digital technologies are all well and good as long as they are being used to secure a college or university's position in the marketplace, these same technologies are dangerous when used by faculty and students to resist the trend toward corporatization. In a chapter titled 'Governing in the age of Internet empires', DeMillo laments the use of digital technologies by 'mobs' of faculty and students. 'It is ironic that the same technologies the (MOOC) Revolution promotes can, in other circumstances, be turned on reformers and legitimate governing bodies', by which he means academic administrators and trustees. 'In the age of social networks, rules matter less ... and empower unaccountable mobs in ways that were unimaginable only a few years ago' (DeMillo, 2015, p. 247). To illustrate this, DeMillo offers several examples of 'unaccountable mobs' on different campuses that demanded (and won) the cancelation of a number of controversial speakers invited to give speeches at graduation ceremonies. To be clear, the 'small band of innovators' is using technology for good, while the 'unaccountable mobs' of faculty and students are using it for ill:

Much as our small band of innovators uses online technology to remake higher education, creating vast communities of new learners and experimenting with new business models, mobs form easily in the era of the Internet, and a mob that grows without limits or accountability can just as easily become a governing force of its own. (DeMillo, 2015, p. 247)

DeMillo inadvertently makes a powerful case for why those in higher education concerned about commercialization need to be using digital technologies to mobilize against it. It is students and faculty – ‘the mobs’ – using digital technologies of the ‘Internet empires’ that have the potential to resist the agenda to privatize and monetize higher education.

The kind of MOOCs that DeMillo heralds as leading a revolution in higher education can be a commodity or a public good. As writer Aaron Bady puts it: ‘Once market logic enters the equation – there is a depreciation of higher education. Then it becomes an ornamental luxury’ (quoted in Cottom, 2013).

### **Our experiment: the #InQ13 POOC**

With our project, we wanted to intervene in the discussion about MOOCs in a way that reaffirmed their potential for opening education and, simultaneously, in a way that resisted the imperative to monetize the experience. Our desire was shaped in part by our unique institution, the City University of New York (CUNY), which is awash with discussions about the promise and perils of open education made possible through an array of digital technologies.

The mission of CUNY is to ‘educate the children of the whole people’. CUNY boasts a fairly recent past of free tuition for all students (CUNY Newswire, 2011). Given this mission and history, we were particularly intrigued by the potential for creating a truly open, online course that reflected that past, and reimagined what education for ‘the whole people’ might look like for the 21st century. With 24 institutions across the 5 boroughs of New York City and about 270,000 degree-credit students and 273,000 continuing and professional education students, it is the third largest university system in the US, and the nation’s largest public urban university. The Graduate Center is CUNY’s principal doctorate-granting institution, offering more than thirty doctoral degrees in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences with significant research on global and progressive policy issues.

A collective of approximately twenty people on our project created a participatory, open, online course, or ‘POOC,’ titled ‘Reassessing Inequality and Re-Imagining the 21st-Century: East Harlem Focus’. The course hashtag, #InQ13 (for inequality, 2013) was adopted by the collective working to produce the course. The course was offered for credit as a graduate seminar through the Graduate Center, and it featured training in community-based participatory research methods.

Students who sought credit for the course enrolled in the usual way through the university. The course was open to the non-academic community for participation. About half of the in-person sessions were held at a CUNY campus in East Harlem and these were open to the community; anyone could watch videos of the course sessions online; and anyone could access the readings assigned for the course online. None of these modes of participation required registration, but those who registered and participated online experienced a greater level of engagement than those who did not enroll. In addition, we held a series of smaller meetings with community leaders about the course that increased awareness about the POOC and about CUNY's interest in East Harlem and potential for future collaboration.

### *A counter to the MOOC moment located in a community*

We designed the course to engage with New York City. We were also concerned with providing a focus for the breadth of disciplinary approaches featured in the course. Several faculty who engaged in early discussions about the course suggested that we create an educational experiment that resisted the 'placelessness' of MOOCs by situating this course in a specific neighborhood. The MOOC moment in which our open, online course emerged influenced its structure and character.

East Harlem is a neighborhood that has simultaneously fostered a vibrant, multi-ethnic tradition of citizen activism and borne the brunt of urban policies that generate inequality. Several of the people in the #InQ13 collective had ties to East Harlem as residents, researchers, community activists, and workers, so the possibility of locating the course there was immediately tangible. In addition, Hunter College, CUNY, had recently opened a new campus supporting public health and social work in this neighborhood. These factors taken together – the unique, vibrant history and present of East Harlem; the connection to the neighborhood from those in the #InQ13 collective; and the new CUNY East Harlem campus – provided a compelling case for situating the course there.

So, the original questions that framed the course were joined by another set of questions: could a course such as this one 'open' the new CUNY campus to the East Harlem community in innovative ways? Given the troubled relationship of university campuses to urban neighborhoods, could we forge a healthy set of relationships? Were there ways that the digital technologies used in the course could offer

a platform for community activists engaged in the struggle against the forces of inequality in East Harlem?

Community engagement with East Harlem began before the course started, and relationships took on more focused energy as course development began. Edwin Mayorga led these efforts as the official community liaison for the course, coordinating with 18 community partners (Daniels et al, 2014). There were also meetings outside of the course in East Harlem between the instructors, software developers, and community partners during the semester. Different parts of the CUNY Graduate Center also had to join forces in unprecedented ways. With POOC organizers aiming to afford every course participant unfettered access to course materials, a strong collaboration with librarians was required to create open access reading lists. The course offered lectures and discussions that were both streamed live and video-recorded, assigned readings, and set a series of assignments. Many of the guest lecturers were also authors of the assigned readings. This confluence provided a unique opportunity to begin discussions with faculty about sharing their work openly on digital platforms to global, non-academic audiences.

CUNY centrally licenses Blackboard software supporting password-protected course readings for enrolled CUNY students. (C)opyright@CUNY, a CUNY-wide library committee, posts guidelines and resources for CUNY instructors managing course reserve readings. Several CUNY libraries additionally offer SirsiDynixERes software and scanning services for local course support. Some CUNY Graduate Center faculty use Blackboard for reserve reading support; others use the CUNY Academic Commons and OpenCUNY platforms, both of which provide password protection for licensed course documents. Still other Graduate Center instructors employ commercial password-protected file-sharing sites (Dropbox and Google Drive, for example) to post course readings. A few instructors continue the analog practice of distributing photocopies, while others provide only assigned reading lists to students, who must find readings on their own.

The #InQ13 course could not apply these licensed course delivery platforms to serve students and lecturer-participants without CUNY affiliation. Similarly, our library-licensed academic works – journal articles, books, book chapters, and other media – could not be extended to audiences other than Graduate Center-affiliated students without violating license agreements. Assigning licensed readings for the #InQ13 course accessible only to those with Graduate Center credentials was antithetical to the goals of the course. Organizers

refused to adopt a tiered access scenario that would only provide full access to course readings to some invited course participants. From the outset, there was little question that the readings assigned for the #InQ13 course had to be fully open access for anyone who wanted to read them.

At the time our course was offered, CUNY did not yet support open access publishing with an institutional repository, so CUNY librarians had to find a repository platform to support the course. Many of the #InQ13 authors unaffiliated with CUNY had posted works in their own university open access repositories. We directed several CUNY and non-CUNY authors to deposit works in the Internet Archive ‘community texts’ section that we established for use with #InQ13.

### *Structure of #InQ13*

Each session was both live-streamed for those who wanted to participate synchronously and then, several days later, a more polished video recording of the class session was released and posted to the #InQ13 course website for those who wanted to participate asynchronously. The assignments for the course were designed by the faculty and by educational technologists (Daniels et al, 2014). Students posted their completed assignments on the course blog at the #InQ13 site. To facilitate group work, students could use a ‘groups’ feature on the site to collaborate around specific projects. As designed, these groups were intended to foster connection between online learners and CUNY-based learners, but the ‘group’ feature was not heavily used. The faculty provided feedback and grades on assignments produced by CUNY-based learners, and the digital fellow provided feedback for online learners (Daniels et al, 2014). At the end of the semester, students were invited to present their projects at a community event at La Casa Azul bookstore in East Harlem (this was in addition to the four regular sessions held in the neighborhood).

Libraries have traditionally offered faculty guidance about copyright by providing software and scanning services for reserved readings and by extending the use of licensed library content to a well-defined set of university-affiliated student users. Under current licensing models, this content cannot be extended any further, say to the massive, unaffiliated, undefined, and unregistered body of MOOC enrollees, without tempting lawsuits. As we see in the Georgia State University e-reserves case,<sup>5</sup> publishers will sue universities providing traditionally enrolled students

with access to course reserve readings, even if the published readings are password-protected and selected according to reasonable interpretations of fair use guidelines (Smith, 2013). Though universities may open courses to anyone with an Internet connection and the will to participate, the vast majority of supporting course content, including academic books, book chapters, articles, and films, are not currently available to universities to redistribute openly. Course readings must either be published open access with copyright owner consent or licensed explicitly for open online course use (Fowler and Smith, 2013).

Kendrick and Gashurov discuss several potential models for MOOC enrollment and revenue generation that offer tiered access to licensed textbooks and scholarly material. Licensed textbooks and journals that are inaccessible to non-paying customers might be free or discounted for ‘premium’ paying MOOC customers, for example (Courtney, 2013; Kendrick and Gashurov, 2013). Coursera negotiated to license resources, just like libraries do, to expand access to textbooks and scholarly journals for their registered MOOC students. Access is supplied at a cost to the course provider, and it is limited to a pale fraction of scholarship available to university-affiliated students through traditional course reserve systems and, increasingly, through open access scholarship.<sup>6</sup> The Coursera and EdX licensing models ask universities to subsidize registered MOOC students’ access to some licensed body of scholarly work, under defined terms, for some determined period of time. University-supported Coursera and EdX are poised to expand MOOC student access to academic content, but only within regulated, publisher-imposed limits.

The moment when licensed scholarly material is on the MOOC syllabus, the MOOC is no longer open in any meaningful sense. A course may be massive and it may be online, but its content is no longer open if students are required to register for access or encouraged to pay to gain enhanced access to course content. Restricted access is antithetical to the project of open access and eviscerates the transformative potential of MOOCs.

Jennifer Dorner says that MOOCs offer ‘a real opportunity to educate faculty about the need for owning the rights to their content and making it accessible to other people’ (Howard, 2013). Librarian–faculty collaboration in MOOC-building also involves conversation with authors about transforming scholarly communication. Activists, artists, and academic authors who participated in our course were invited to make their work openly available online through our course.

MOOCs offer authors a unique opportunity to widen readership and to raise the profile of their work. Prompted by authors’ potential

to increase exposure to additional readers through MOOCs, book publishers proved to be willing, and even eager, to make traditionally published works open access, at least temporarily and in part, if they were assigned readings for our open online course. Several book publishers, when approached by librarians, with an author being copied into the discussion, made copyright-restricted books and book chapters openly available online, particularly when the author appeared in our open online presentation series.

### *Evaluating the course, evaluating ourselves*

The #InQ13 POOC was an alternative to MOOCs, emphasizing openness and participatory action above massiveness of scale. When the goal is for a course to be massive, the primary metric of evaluation is how many people register for the course. We took as our chief goal to create a course that was above all open and participatory, and this is much more challenging to evaluate. To do this, we considered a wide variety of measures to evaluate the course and ourselves.

According to what we could glean from quantitative measures, the #InQ13 course was a modest success. We had more than 8,700 visitors from 26 countries visit the course site. This is an extraordinary amount of interest in a graduate course on inequality, but it is modest when compared to the massive numbers that some online courses garner. We had a live video stream from 12 class sessions, and videographers created an equal number of more polished videos of these classes. These videos were viewed more than 2,800 times. Twenty students enrolled through the Graduate Center, and all completed the course successfully, as did one student who participated exclusively online. Several other students participated online but did not complete the course. Together, these students created over 240 blog posts and digital projects that they posted to the course site. The course hosted 26 guest speakers from the community and from different academic and philanthropic institutions. We held four classes as live events, open to the public, in East Harlem, and over 450 people attended these events, and another 300 or so participated in the course through the hashtag #InQ13. We also worked to make all the materials for this course, including the readings, truly open as a public good, rather than locking them behind a paywall. Altogether we offered 117 legitimately open access readings to readers anywhere through this course (see also Chapter Four).

Traditional measures of learning assessment are valuable, yet they often overlook the variety of learners and the wide range of their goals

in engaging with such a course. Many people engaged with the course as lifelong learners, less interested in a certificate of completion than in an engaging dialogue about subjects that matter to them. ‘I put it on and listen to it while I cook dinner, just like NPR’, explained one woman via Twitter comparing the POOC videos to National Public Radio. A handful of online students revealed that they were interested in returning to graduate school, and so the course served as a way for them to experience a graduate course as a prospective student. A large portion of those who attended the public, in-person events were from the neighborhood of East Harlem.

The #InQ13 collective also included 18 community partners in East Harlem, and here we were less successful. The community partners we spoke with had several complaints about our project, all of them entirely valid. They said that we had come to them too late in the process, which we had. Our project, only funded for one calendar year, sometimes operated at a breakneck pace that was not conducive to the long, cautious process of relationship building necessary for community engagement. Several distrusted the university as a whole and, more specifically, objected to a course about East Harlem that was taught by CUNY faculty rather than by residents of the neighborhood. This highlighted the inequality between the university and the community we wanted to engage. If we had had the luxury of more time, we could have found more innovative ways to staff the course. Many residents who attended our live events at the East Harlem campus said that they were made to feel unwelcome in the building by campus security. This was not a particular complaint related to our project, but reflects a longstanding tension between neighborhood residents and the campus. As difficult as these critiques were to hear, we were grateful that so many individuals, groups and organizations in East Harlem were willing to support our endeavor.

### **Forward thinking: opening education for all**

‘A year from now we’ll be talking about something different from MOOCs, but in my view, we’ll still be asking essentially the same questions: How do we teach in digital networked environments?’ predicted George Siemens, one of the co-founders of the original MOOC (Waters, 2013). This question remains for us the central one. Given the hype about MOOCs, and our experiment with the #InQ13 course, how then do we teach in digitally networked environments? Our answer to that question began with concrete interactions between

a student community and a geographically specific city neighborhood, which called for a very different kind of model for learning, far removed from the broadcast teaching environments employed in most MOOCs.

While MOOCs have spurred discussions about online courses extending the reach of higher education institutions (and, in the process, proffering new, more profitable business models for them), our experiences with the #InQ13 course suggests that online courses that emphasize interaction between faculty, students, and broader communities are accompanied by significant institutional and economic costs. The #InQ13 course required at least 20 different individuals to produce it. Although college and university administrators envision MOOCs as a labor-saving, cost-cutting technology for higher education, our model offers an alternative. Our participatory, open, online course was, in fact, a job creation program. We employed more people, not fewer, through our version of a MOOC.

‘There isn’t one course format to rule them all’, says Alex Havalais, former President of the Association of Internet Researchers and a professor at Arizona State University. ‘MOOCs were and are just one potential collection of approaches to organizing a course’ (Waters, 2013). The same year that we experimented with our POOC, several other variations on the MOOCs appeared, from ‘small private online courses’ (SPOCs) to ‘synchronous massive online courses’ (SMOCs).

The proliferation of these kinds of experiments by faculty and in ways that are not primarily driven by market considerations, suggest that there are profound shifts happening in the way that scholars in the digital era approach the classroom, the university, and wider publics (Losh, 2016). For example, Anne Balsamo, Dean of the School of Media Studies at The New School in New York City and Alexandra Juhasz, a professor of media studies at Pitzer College in Claremont, California, launched FemTechNet (FemTechNet, 2016) and what they called ‘distributed open collaborative courses’ (DOCCs), in which classes are organized around a feminist scholarship and the expertise is spread among the participants. Many of the instances of the DOCC were taught in community spaces, feminist bookstores, and one was held in a laundromat. The FemTechNet collaborative illustrates another way to think about communities – around shared interests and identity as feminists – rather than a geographically specific neighborhood. Both these experiments suggest a horizon of possibilities of opening up education in the digital era.

‘This isn’t just about MOOCs, this is about the democratization of learning’, says Andrew Ho, an education researcher (Hazlett, 2014). Ho and research partner Isaac Chuang contend that institutions can

learn something from these experiments. Institutions are beginning to appreciate how collaborations across institutions that involve many people beyond the traditional university can open up new routes to understanding. Those collaborations are ‘making a difference around the world and back here on campus’, Chuang says (Hazlett, 2014).

One way forward suggested by our experiment is to reimagine the digitally networked classroom connected to actual neighborhoods. It would be possible to create an ongoing course, like the one we did for one semester, as a more or less permanent feature of an institution. Such a course could be designed to be truly open, including all the readings, to anyone who wanted to participate, for an evening or for longer. Such a course might focus on a particular social justice issue that is relevant to that neighborhood, like water rights or land use or fresh food availability.

In this realignment of what such courses might do in a neighborhood, the primary function of the university becomes promoting civic culture, while the neighborhood promotes the advancement of learning. Ernest Boyer describes a similar engagement between a university and a city in Basel, Switzerland: ‘The university was engaged in civic advancement, the city was engaged in intellectual advancement, and the two were joined’ (Boyer, 1996, p. 25). To achieve this would require a substantial philanthropic investment as well as an institutional commitment to the course, but the return on that investment would be both a civic and an academic culture that is enriched.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The term ‘K-12’ is a term used to describe the publicly-supported educational system prior to college in the US, and refers to the grades kindergarten (K) and the 1st through the 12th grade (1-12).
- <sup>2</sup> Credentialed refers to anyone possessing a degree from a college or university.
- <sup>3</sup> At the time of writing (January 2016), there are no news reports about how this degree program, or the partnership subsidizing it, is progressing. Udacity’s site says ‘check back’ for progress updates. A question posted to Twitter by one of the authors (Daniels) about the status of the project got a reply from an executive at Udacity, which said simply: ‘It’s going great’. No other details were provided.
- <sup>4</sup> In 2013, a total of 26 victims came forward to demand redress from Penn State College for sexual abuse committed by Jerry Sandusky while he was an assistant football coach at the college. Sandusky was convicted and is now serving a 30- to 60-year prison sentence for the abuse. In a settlement, Penn State agreed to pay \$59.7 million in exchange for an

end to their claims against the university. For more, see [www.nytimes.com/2013/10/29/sports/ncaafootball/penn-state-to-pay-59-7-million-to-26-sandusky-victims.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/29/sports/ncaafootball/penn-state-to-pay-59-7-million-to-26-sandusky-victims.html)

- <sup>5</sup> The GSU e-reserves case is also known more formally as *Cambridge University Press vs Patton*. In 2016, a federal court found that Georgia State University's use of digitized course readings known as e-reserves is protected by fair use. The lawsuit, filed by three academic publishers (Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press and Sage Publications, with support from the Copyright Clearance Center and the AAP), alleged that GSU administrators systematically encourage faculty to offer unlicensed digital copies to students as a no-cost alternative to traditionally licensed coursepacks, for which the publishers charge a fee. For more, see [www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/copyright/article/69830-gsu-prevails-again-in-key-copyright-case.html](http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/copyright/article/69830-gsu-prevails-again-in-key-copyright-case.html)
- <sup>6</sup> See *The Dramatic Growth of Open Access Series* at <http://poeticeconomics.blogspot.ca/2006/08/dramatic-growth-of-open-access-series.html>