



NWO

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INTERVIEW KNOWLEDGE UTILISATION IN THE HUMANITIES

MOOC Miracles of Language by Marc van Oostendorp

Last spring, more than 45,000 participants took the first Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) about linguistics from Leiden University professor Marc van Oostendorp. On 26 October 2015 the second edition started. Van Oostendorp is involved in research that is funded by the NWO Programmes Open Competition, Horizon, and PhDs in the Humanities.

Why this MOOC?

'I am very interested in education and in the possibilities that the Internet provides for this. For me, this MOOC was the opportunity to combine both of these interests.'

How did the first edition go?

'We wanted to provide a Socratic form of education, i.e. teach in dialogue with participants. We have therefore experimented extensively with interaction. For example, in the videos I held discussions with two student assistants, we maintained a very active Facebook page where participants could come into contact with each other, and during the duration of the MOOC we talked with participants several times via Google Hangout. We had far more participants than expected: an amazing 45,000 participants from 190 countries took part and about 10,000 of them gained the final certificate. They were so enthusiastic that we managed to raise an additional 10,000 euros via crowdfunding to add an extra module to the course.'

How did it benefit you as a scholar?

'Teaching is always useful. We focused on people without prior knowledge. That means you have to go all the way back to the basic assumptions and you need to ask yourself why you do things the way you do. In addition the participants also come with questions that make you think. We also collected a wealth of videos that we are now using in our education in Leiden. One of the exercises participants had to do included speaking a number of sentences in their own language so that we could show something about the differences in sounds, syntax and the exchange of pleasantries. And now all of a sudden I have direct contact with people from all over the world.'

In future we might be able to approach them for research using questionnaires or something similar.'

Tips for fellow researchers?

'The real strength of such a MOOC is the social element. That is where the added value lies compared to a self-study book or a video course. The interaction between the participants, and between you as the lecturer and your students is worth a lot. Participants from throughout the world then really get the idea that they are following a course together. That motivates. However it does mean that you need to invest a lot of time in it yourself and that you cannot offer the course on a continuous basis. Course participants all need to be involved at the same time and in this period you must also be available to be able to discuss things with them via Facebook or Google Hangout.'



Website

MOOC Miracles of Language: <https://www.coursera.org/course/humanlanguage>

Video's of students from the first course: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLz0pyl6uSUGLm-gQ53-xZvLrXsl6_hAWR-

Contact & more information

Marleen van de Vate, T: +31 70 3440967

E: m.vandevate@nwo.nl

W: www.nwo.nl/gw/knowledge-utilisation; <http://www.nwo.nl/en/policies/knowledge+utilisation>