

Stimulating educational innovation today to better prepare the future changes of society

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen, and fellow rectors,

It is a real pleasure for me to have the opportunity to speak to you today as part of the 2nd D-Transform Dissemination Event. I will be speaking about what is at stake - from the point of view of higher education leaders – in relation to the educational strategies that need to be implemented to address the challenges of our knowledge society. This means not only the expectations of the new generations of students, the Digital Natives, but more generally, the expectations of ordinary citizens.

To address this topic I will refer to my own experience at my university, and following this testimony, I will share a few thoughts with you.

I have been the President of Nanterre University for 4 years and will speak to you about a few initiatives we have taken in terms of educational innovation and the French environment in which these occurred.

Let me begin by giving you a brief description of the university. The University of Nanterre is a young university - only 52 years old. Its academic program is primarily focused on the humanities and social sciences, and it has extensive experience in distance learning – since the 1970s. Our university also has solid experience in educational innovation – in France we created double-degree courses such as French law-German law, French law-Commonwealth law, etc. Applied Languages degrees, distance learning – Bachelor's then Master's, and multidisciplinary programs such as a Bachelor's and Master's in the Humanities.

The University of Nanterre has 35,000 students, therefore making it one of the largest in France. It is in fact in a competitive environment, especially as it is located in the greater Paris region, which has more than a third of all French university students. My challenge as President is to maintain our research activity at a very high level in our different fields (we have more than 40 research units), to develop attractive, quality academic programs, both by fulfilling our mission to democratize higher education and by offering educational training which is more or less demanding. My personal conviction is also that a university such as ours, in its true role as a university, and specifically one specialized in the humanities and social sciences, must demonstrate its capacity to shine beyond a strictly academic scope. This obviously means helping our students to acquire a high level of knowledge and skills in multiple disciplines by appropriately training them for many professions, some of which are now undergoing tremendous change, or are emerging professions, often related to the digital transition. But it also means directly integrating the issue of Lifelong Learning, by disseminating the knowledge that it produces and teaches, and applying it to social progress, through involvement and commitment in the field by volunteer faculty employees, teachers and students, through many types of actions such as academic support, remediation, helping to re-integrate into society young people with problems, and providing assistance in prisons. Also, through cultural initiatives, by opening the university to a non-university public, or conversely, by becoming involved in our surrounding town, and finally by encouraging what is now called the science/society dialogue.

For many reasons, as of 2012 I was led to reflect upon the new initiatives which were emerging on the other side of the Atlantic in the field of digital learning, and most especially the different MOOCs supported by powerful platforms such as Coursera and edX.

At that time we were observing how the MOOCs produced by American universities seemed to be designed to allow them to potentially reach the entire world, to capture new audiences, and, finally, to recruit via this channel quality students who were identified by following up MOOC learners. The potential force of this soft power, of the establishment of a worldwide presence and of

international recruitment for these universities began to clearly appear.

On our side, in a university such as ours, we knew how to offer distance learning, recorded lectures, online resources, even video conferences, but we did not know how to produce MOOCs, a phenomenon for which we were not prepared.

Then in 2013, the French Ministry for Higher Education and Research took the initiative of creating a national platform called FUN-MOOC and invited universities to participate in this project. I was contacted about this initiative and immediately decided to involve our university in this experience.

We were in the comfortable position of already having a national platform in charge of the dissemination. We were simply responsible for producing the MOOCs. We very quickly decided on two courses – firstly a MOOC on philosophy and another MOOC on history, and then quickly set out to design these courses. We needed a technical team and we had one. We needed two educational teams - one for each MOOC. Those teams were quickly assembled and there were 4 persons for each MOOC plus a tutor. As I thought it would be my role to convince and overcome any reticence, and as I was also curious to observe close up how a MOOC worked (in other words to find out about the production and dissemination phases), I decided to personally involve myself in the production of the MOOC on philosophy. In the end, I gave a quarter of the lectures.

This was a very rewarding experience for me. It allowed me to discover from the inside how a MOOC is created and therefore to concretely understand the complexity which is involved in terms of course design and organization, and the crucial importance of educational engineering. Designing sequences in 5 to 10 minute formats is initially based on traditional educational skills, but especially requires appropriate screenwriting which is totally different from simply filming a lecture. Offering a MOOC also implies having exercises suited to the learning context, i.e. self-training, and this implies the integration of an interactive dimension, which through the forums allows learners to exchange and self-correct themselves. And all of this is done under the control of a tutor, working in conjunction with the authors of the MOOC.

In terms of impact, our experience in 2014 was very positive. The two MOOCs which we produced were very successful. Nearly 10,000 learners signed up for the MOOC on history, which was dedicated to World War One and which was based on a critical study of archive documents. In addition, there were more than 16,000 learners for the MOOC on philosophy which focused on “Philosophy and Life Style, from Socrates to Michel Foucault”. This made the MOOC on philosophy the second most popular on the national FUN-MOOC platform, behind a course on management.

There were four main benefits to launching these two MOOCs in 2014:

- 1) Firstly, the production of these initial MOOCs enabled our university to contribute - in a new and very powerful format – to the dissemination of high level academic knowledge in an educational format which is open to everyone. The science-society dialogue, to which I would like our university to significantly contribute, was enriched by our high impact contributions.
- 2) Then, as you might imagine, the fact that the University of Nanterre took part in this national initiative from the very outset, and had two successful MOOCs, directed a spotlight on our institution and its Philosophy and History departments. This experience has generated a prolonged interest not only in the specialized press, but also in the national press. Aside from the initial media effect, it is clear that the production of MOOCs by an educational institution contributes positively to its reputation and attractiveness.
- 3) Thirdly, from the point of view of attractiveness, following the launch of the MOOCs, we observed at the beginning of the academic year in September 2014 that there was an increase in the number of students registered for distance learning degree courses in philosophy and history (i.e. Bachelor's and Master's degrees). Even though this was not really one of our aims, it is nevertheless an appreciable consequence of the production of the MOOCs.
- 4) Within the university, the initiative to produce the MOOCs was decided by the presidency without any prior consultation. The announcement of this initiative provoked some surprise and

even a little suspicion. However, the fact that I was personally involved in the creation of a MOOC on philosophy, and that the two MOOCs were quite successful, and that this success has extended far beyond the academic sphere, has generally resulted in a very positive perception of the MOOCs. Afterwards, several colleagues indicated to us their desire to create new ones, and, as a result, two more MOOCs were produced in 2015-16. The first MOOC is in the field of information technology and deals with digital archiving. The other one is in the field of economics and management, and examines the issue of sustainable development, and more specifically, the question of responsible consumption. Two more new MOOCs will be produced next year, one in law on arbitration and the other in literature and the arts on the Age of Enlightenment.

A movement has thus been set in motion and it is undoubtedly irreversible. In 2014-15, following a call for projects, we received funding for a recording and mixing studio completely suited to the production needs of MOOCs. As part of our contract with the French State, in the same year we decided to use one of the positions we had been allocated, to create a job for an education engineer dedicated to the production of MOOCs. Internally we have organized a procedure for the collection and selection of proposals for the creation of MOOCs. In addition, participating in the production of a MOOC has been added to the list of extra duties for which a research professor may receive additional remuneration.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the opportunities for development and the challenges I perceive for the university and even beyond.

At the University of Nanterre we will pursue our production of MOOCs with a view to the continued dissemination of knowledge to the greatest number of people. Our MOOCs will therefore become a lasting and permanent addition to our other educational and scientific activities. We will only produce one or two new MOOCs per year, given their production costs, and also because we would like to maintain the principle of no financial charge which is in the spirit of this course. Having said that, this production process with which we are gaining more experience, represents a touchstone to test and anticipate future changes in the formats we use for our degree programs, and the opportunity to enrich and improve these programs.

For example, two years ago we implemented a new type of Bachelor's degree at the university level. This new degree includes what we call "personalized learning paths". These learning paths enable the student to choose e-learning modules, which in turn open up the possibility of discovering other disciplines or gaining a multidisciplinary point of view of a specific subject. The student follows the modules on a Moodle platform, which we have called "coursenligne" in French, or onlinecourses in English. These modules can be accessed from a digital working environment. Access is provided to the content of the course and to the exercises, and the student autonomously trains him or herself under the supervision of a tutor. We do not yet use the resources derived from the MOOCs in this program or any MOOC-like formats, but we will progressively do so in order to introduce a more attractive and interactive dimension. In this way, the personalized learning path which we will offer next September on the subject of sustainable development should include some elements from the MOOC on "responsible consumption".

The onlinecourses platform is also used to enrich in-class learning at the university. Depending on the subject of the MOOC, it may in part or in entirety be used in the teaching of those disciplines which have accepted a different form of instruction referred to as a "flipped classroom". There are no technical obstacles preventing the use of this type of teaching. As long as the head of the academic program and the teachers agree to experiment this type of approach, it can be implemented. This is what one of my colleagues tested this year with the MOOC on digital archiving, as part of a Bachelor's in Information and Communication. And this is what the law professors are considering as they prepare to produce the MOOC on arbitration, which will be part

of a Master's in law.

We are also thinking of using the MOOC format to meet the needs of continuing education, which are not easy to satisfy, especially given the constraints facing employees and companies. The production of what would be SPOCs (Small Private Online Courses) would provide learners with distance learning on targeted subjects. At present we are readying ourselves for this type of course. This would mean building an interactive course for a small audience. Successful completion of the course would need to be formalized, perhaps through the awarding of a certificate or even a degree. This would be a pay-for-education model, completely different from the free model to which we have adhered up to now, but which would be justified in the context of continuing education.

In order to support all these changes in education, providing adequate training for university educators will be indispensable. While at present we offer training programs all year long that provide an initiation to the resources available on the onlinecourses platform, we are now preparing new training programs to familiarize educators not only with the MOOC and SPOC formats, but also with the new educational formats which can be tested in an in-class setting, for example, the flipped classroom and collaborative work. This will be done under the auspices of an Educational Innovation Center which will soon be created in conjunction with our partner, the University of Paris 8.

What is at stake through these changes and innovations is first and foremost the ability of higher education to adapt itself to a new context, to changing times. And to derive the maximum benefit from these technological changes in terms of information and communication. In doing this, and through the use of innovative tools and changing educational formats, our aim must be to better meet the educational needs of our students in our universities, and to better serve our societal mission to disseminate knowledge as widely as possible. Then we need to support our students, who are growing up in a digital world, who, thanks to the Internet, have access to such a wide range of resources, but without necessarily having a critical approach. By moving academic knowledge into this digital world, by using digital tools and by critically reflecting on the behavior of our students in relation to the digital world, the Internet and social networks, we will be able to avoid the divorce, which ultimately would have a dramatic impact, between the academic world and what the young generations would perceive as the "real" world. So, in fact what is at stake is for our students to acquire specialist skills and knowledge in a digital world and for universities to develop the capacity to contribute to the emergence of an educational policy in favor of enlightened digital citizenship.

Thank you for your attention.