



CAME Voice/Voix

Fun, Interesting, and Accessible: Making Your New Year's Education Goals a Reality

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As 2016 dawns, many medical educators will feel the pull to make resolutions, as if a tiny magnet accidentally ingested in a Christmas pudding is drawing them toward shiny new goals for self-improvement. As teachers we value learning, so instead of signing up for gym memberships, educators register for courses. And yet, just as ingested foreign bodies eventually pass, so too does the initial burst of enthusiasm. You find yourself asking, "In what delirious state did I sign up for a 2-day seminar on constructivist approaches to OSCE scoring, and on a weekend, no less?" So what can keep the zeal for professional development alive?

Working in faculty development (as I do) one discovers that faculty voluntarily engage in activities only if they are: a) fun, b) interesting, and c) accessible. What is meant by *fun* or *interesting* varies among individuals, but obstacles to accessibility are predictable. Time, location, convenience and cost all have a strongly negative impact on engagement, and are weighted disproportionately against the positive factors. In mathematical terms, the "fun and interesting" quotient of an activity must be astronomical to convince people to drive across town and pay for parking.

One solution whose popularity is growing is asynchronous online programming. Courses offered in this format can be completed anywhere, any time. Discussion boards offer opportunities for interaction with instructors and other participants. Like many medical schools, Dalhousie uses asynchronous online learning in faculty development. As one participant wrote "for time-strapped learners, this is essentially the only way." Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are one way of doing this. My favourite MOOC provider is Coursera ([coursera.org](https://www.coursera.org)). Their (free) course options include Teaching and Assessing Clinical Skills and Instructional Methods in Health Professions Education from the University of Michigan.

So what about the fun and interesting quotient? Fortunately, most Coursera course developers seem to get how important this is, and include interesting visuals, dynamic presenters, and engaging topics in the programming. Videos are generally brief with embedded self-tests to encourage interactivity. Critics may scoff about 'edutainment', but a spoonful of it certainly makes the didactic content go down smoother. I recently took a superb Coursera course on marketing, and am currently signed up for another on 'gamification'.

Fun, interesting, and accessible. Perfect for my New Year's resolutions to improve myself. This might be the year...

University of Pennsylvania Gamification course: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/gamification>

University of Michigan 'Teaching Clinical Skills': <https://www.coursera.org/course/clinicalskills>