

## My Future as a Learner...

### ...otherwise known as my *Spinach for the Brain*



As I near completion of my Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) degree, it offers a great opportunity to reflect on what I've accomplished as a learner, and where my future focus lies.

Looking beyond the near term, additional formal education is unlikely. This master's degree has always been a personal objective of mine, and not directly driven by any work-related goals or priorities. Unless some major changes to either my employment or position occur, there simply isn't a reward to justify the personal costs and time effort in pursuing another masters or a doctorate degree.

However any and all short term and low (or no) cost forms of learning are still of interest to me.

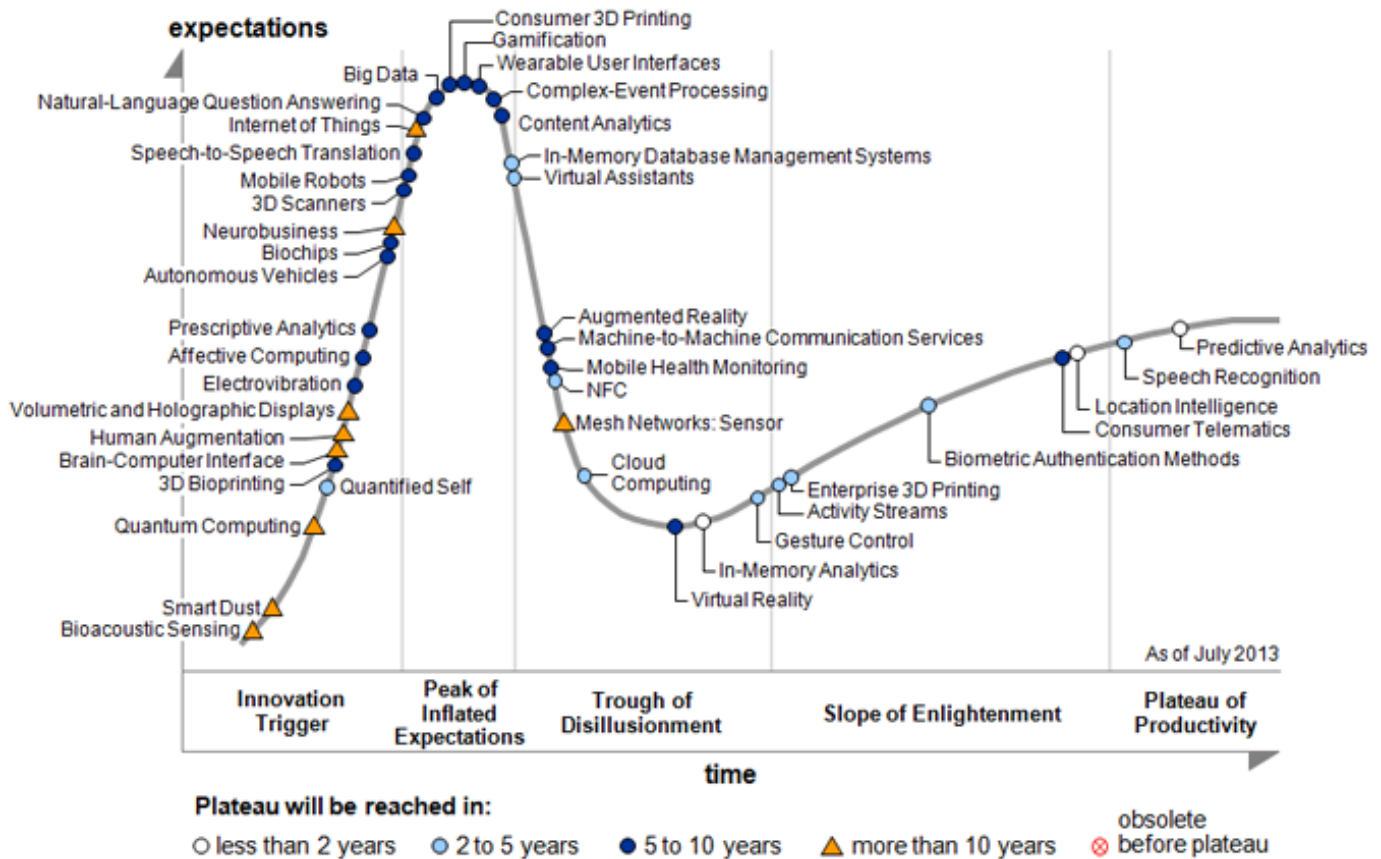
At my job at Michigan State University (MSU) my team has two main objectives, software systems architecture and testing. We annually search for and attend IT seminars and conferences that focus on software testing. We interact well as a team, and have formed a sort of personal learning network around testing which I use to bounce questions and ideas off of the others. I am also fortunate to have multiple opportunities for personal development. Each year I am provided an individual budget of \$500 that can be used to take classes that pertain, directly and indirectly, with my daily job tasks. MSU offers online and instructor-led classes in many technical and management areas and generally approves all requested courses.

Currently I am in a small pilot group studying for a Certified Business Analyst Professional (CBAP) designation, a globally recognized certification for business analysts. It requires passing an intensive test as well as providing documentation that supports 7500 hours of personal experience in six technical analyst knowledge areas over the past ten years. During the preparation my study group is taking turns presenting chapter content to the rest of the group, by reflecting on prior analytic knowledge and skills that support and provide "real world" tie-ins to the content we are covering. I have also created a wiki site that our group uses to save off certification skills, quizzes and other supporting information. Beyond gaining accreditation for each of us, a goal of our pilot group is to create a collaborative set of learning materials that future MSU team members can use as they study and work towards their own CBAP certification. I am currently planning to take my certification test sometime in the Fall of 2014.

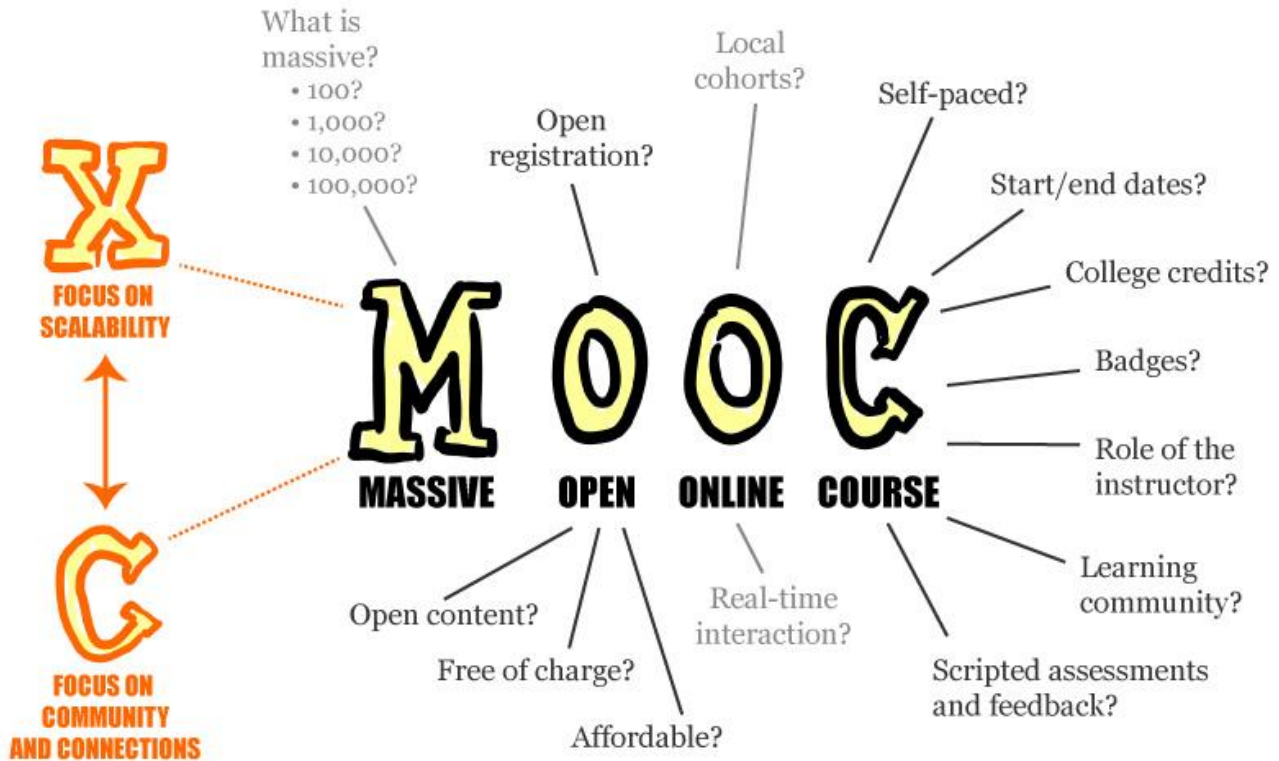
MSU also provides several web-based information sources that are free to employees; the first one is Gartner Consulting, a research-based company used by many of the Fortune 500 companies to obtain key business and technology information. Their Hype Cycles (see Figure 1 on page 2) and Magic Quadrant reports are highly regarded and touch on education, technology and other business topics to reflect the current day and where the focus may be in the future. The other MSU learning resource is Skillsoft, a cloud-based collection of online

articles, courses, videos and job aides that support learning and individual training on many technical, educational and business topics. Both the Gartner and Skillsoft sites are accessible to MSU employees anywhere through an Internet connection and I continually rely on both of these as sources to obtain new information that I use in my day-to-day business technology projects.

**Figure 1: 2013 Gartner Hype Cycle on Emerging Technologies**



Outside of MSU, I am also interested in adding to my knowledge through the use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), especially those from reputable Universities that offer certificates or statements of completion. There are usually little or no costs for MOOCs, and they provide users with a diverse selection of classes, including several that I've already found that are of personal interest to me. I've found it is important that I have an elevated level of interest in what I study; otherwise I don't form deep understanding or long term retention of what I learn.



Finally, my learning must continue to center around who I am as an individual and employee of MSU; using my ever-present quest for learning and engaging MSU subject matter experts in discussion on topics I enjoy and want to explore at deeper levels. Everyone brings their own experiences and methods for both interpreting and representing what they know; and I’m continually learning about topics that I thought I already knew a great deal about. I enjoy coaching and mentoring others on my business and technical experiences and knowledge, and find the questions they ask of me can be as revealing as the information I provide back to them. It also helps and motivates me to find the best method(s) to communicate my knowledge to them.

In summary I’ve long enjoyed learning, and especially within topics I have a passion for - which generally includes everything technology-related. I find any learning experience that invoke cognitive responses within me are productive and brain-smart; it’s not only personally enjoyable, I also find it is my “**Spinach for the Brain**” that helps me retain what I’ve learned, and provided the impetus to keep searching for what I don’t yet know or fully understand.

*Brian Jenks*  
*July, 2014*

Image Sources:

- [http://img4-1.realsimple.timeinc.net/images/1205/illo-spinach-brain\\_300.jpg](http://img4-1.realsimple.timeinc.net/images/1205/illo-spinach-brain_300.jpg)
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