From xMOOCs to cMOOCs: Using Positive Psychology to Build Supportive, Engaging, and Effective Online Learning Experiences

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MAPP 714: Applying Positive Interventions in Organizations

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May 7, 2023
Abstract

This service learning project reports on an intervention designed and conducted by the Pink Team of the Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) program at the University of Pennsylvania. This intervention was conducted at the Positive Psychology Research Center (PPRC) at Tsinghua University in Mainland, China. The project aimed to improve the learning quality of Global Massive Open Online Course (GMOOC) program by transforming it from a teacher-centered, one-way xMOOC model to a more interactive and relational cMOOC model through enhancing connections and relationships among the participants. This project comprises three phases. In part one, we performed a thorough situation analysis, profiling our partner (Tsinghua University PPRC) and the industry sector they are operating. We detailed the PPRC’s positive psychology GMOOC, analyzed its strengths and weaknesses, and identified areas for improvement, which was to enhance relationships and connections. In part two Literature Review, we reviewed theoretical frameworks relevant to relationships. We identified three key concepts to guide our design: i) high-quality connections (HQC), ii) mattering, and iii) mutual value theory. In part three, we generated an application plan which outlines six evidence-informed activities with the purpose of enhancing online relationships and community-building. Finally, a detailed step-by-step handbook on how to implement these activities is also provided at the end.
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PART 1: SITUATION ANALYSIS

Introduction

Online teaching and learning have not only become a trend but also a must for many schools and organizations. Out of many online teaching formats and platforms, MOOC has become an increasingly popular learning platform for higher education courses (Coursera, 2020). As popular as MOOC courses have become internationally, their learning effect and learning outcome are yet to be investigated (Mordor Intelligence, 2022).

To explore ways of enhancing MOOC online learning, we collaborated with the Positive Psychology Research Center (PPRC) at Tsinghua University as a service learning project as a course requirement for MAPP 714 Applying Positive Interventions in Institutions at the University of Pennsylvania. Our goal for this service project was to use this project as an opportunity to integrate content from the Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) program at UPenn, proposing a positive intervention that would serve to increase the well-being of the target population of our service learning partner. To understand the needs of our service learning partner, we scheduled several meetings with key individuals. We had three formal meetings between our MAPP team (Dengting Boyanton, Jamie Chung, Eugene (Yu Jin) Tee, and Lixian (Sherry) Xie), Dr. Zhao, and the Tsinghua PPRC GMOOC team. The first two meetings were held on the 17th and 19th of January 2023. In addition, the MAPP team also held three separate meetings to discuss the project and also held one consulting meeting with our advisor Christina Cheuk. Finally, we met once more with Dr. Zhao and the PPRC GMOOC team on 9th February 2023 to follow up on plans moving forward and to confirm the MAPP team’s roles as mentors for the PPRC GMOOC.
From these meetings, we learned about the organization’s background, vision and mission, projects and programs, challenges, and needs. After conducting in-depth analysis, we decided to mainly work on the Positive Psychology Global Massive Open Online Course (GMOOC) program. Specifically, we have chosen to focus on ways to enhance the quality of students’ learning experiences and community-building within an online learning context.

This situation analysis will cover five areas: i) an overview of Tsinghua University and the PPRC, and the Center’s Positive Psychology GMOOC Program, ii) sector analysis of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), iii) PPRC’s Positive Psychology GMOOC Program, its opportunities and challenges, iv) identified strengths and weaknesses and v) suggested application plans.

Overview of Tsinghua University and the Positive Psychology Research Center (PPRC)

Tsinghua University is a national public university located in Beijing, China. It was first founded in 1911 and is one of the most prestigious universities in the world, ranking 16th on the 2023 Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) World University Rankings (World University Rankings 2023) and 17th on the 2022 QS World University Rankings (QS World University Rankings 2022). The university has 21 schools and 59 departments with faculties across a wide range of disciplines (Tsinghua University, 2020).

The PPRC was co-founded by Dr. Kaiping Peng and Dr. Yukun Zhao. The vision of PPRC is to increase the well-being of 10% the Chinese population through research-informed positive psychology programs. Dr. Zhao currently serves as the Associate Director of the PPRC and is the contact person for our service project. To date, the PPRC has developed several programs and initiatives revolving around positive psychology. Their most recent offering is the
Positive Psychology GMOOC (Tsinghua University, 2021), which is the program that we will be supporting for this service project.

**Sector Analysis: Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) – Overview and Trends**

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are a mode of education delivered online over the internet, facilitated by interactions between learners and subject matter experts around a defined area of study (Saadatdoost et al., 2015). MOOCs are popular given their low cost, accessibility, and lack of formal eligibility requirements for enrollment. The MOOCs market is expected to grow to more than US$7 billion by 2027. Market research firm Mordor Intelligence estimates that the MOOC market is expected to record a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 34.7% over the next five years, partly due to the growing interest across sectors on how education can be delivered outside of traditional classroom settings (Mordor Intelligence, 2022).

As a specific comparison, popular MOOC provider Coursera reports that their platform saw a 248% growth in enrolments to 59 million learners, and a 164% increase in learning hours to 178 million hours during the pandemic (Coursera, 2020).

MOOCs can be broadly divided into two models: xMOOC model and cMOOC model. xMOOCs model is based on a behaviorist-cognitive paradigm, emphasizing knowledge transfer. In the xMOOC model, the instructor prepares pre-recorded teaching materials and learners learn from these materials at their own pace (Moe, 2015). Popular MOOC platforms such as Coursera and edX follow this teacher-centered form of learning. Kesim and Altinpulluk (2015) state that learners engaging with xMOOCs are motivated to complete the course to attain subject credits over enhancing skill proficiency.

In contrast, cMOOCs are based on a connectivist-driven paradigm, wherein the transfer of knowledge occurs when learners engage with and participate in the shared, collective
community of learning (Anderson & Dron, 2011). Kop (2011) highlights that it is in these interactions with fellow learners that knowledge transfer occurs. The learning experience becomes transformative because learners themselves share and co-create knowledge with peers.

The utility of MOOCs extends beyond it being a platform by which to satisfy the global population’s intrinsic learning goals. Bettiol et al. (2022) note that MOOCs play a crucial role in public health – specifically, in upskilling both professionals and members of the general public by disseminating timely, important, and health-promoting knowledge at scale. This point seems especially important in a post-pandemic world and extends to learning about ways to enhance well-being beyond physical health. To that end, Tsinghua University’s Positive Psychology GMOOC presents an excellent opportunity for a large-scale initiative to develop an interest in positive psychology on a global scale and enact positive psychology-inspired social change in the post-pandemic world.

**Overview of the PPRC’s Positive Psychology Global Massive Open Online Course (GMOOC)**

The Positive Psychology GMOOC aims to encourage more people to learn about positive psychology and ultimately increase the global impact of positive psychology. This GMOOC has four goals: (i) to promote the global dissemination of positive psychology, (ii) to provide high-quality online learning resources and exchange opportunities, (iii) to expand the global learning community, and (iv) to experiment with online student teaching and learning. The GMOOC’s specific population and the current audience include students from Tsinghua University, the Global MOOC and Online Education Alliance, the Global Learning Community, as well as students from other universities. However, little is known about the students’ demographics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, profession), motivation, goals, past and overall learning experiences, or
suggestions for future program improvement and enhancement. That said, a recent large-scale study shows two themes most directly pertinent to the students enrolled in Tsinghua’s GMOOC, offering hints on student demographics and motivations for their enrolment. Sampling various MOOC platforms, including the XueTangX platform where Tsinghua’s GMOOC is hosted, by Ruipérez-Valiente et al. (2021), showed that students chose courses based on topical interest, and were more at ease learning from well-established institutions. Further, subject matter interest is also a predictor of satisfaction with MOOCs along with both continued intentions to use and recommend the MOOC (Lu et al., 2019). These factors contribute to both opportunities and avenues for improvement, which we will detail in the following section.

The Tsinghua GMOOC project team comprises both the management and instructional teams. The management team consists of a superintendent, managers, and teaching assistants (TAs). The instructional team consists of instructors and mentors. The two instructors, Dr. Kaiping Peng and Dr. Yukun Zhao deliver the online course content via pre-recorded lectures. The GMOOC’s mentors serve a role similar to that of an assistant instructor. Each mentor supervises 5 teams of 4-5 students per team. Mentors’ responsibilities include (i) designing interactive learning activities, (ii) attending the orientation and graduation, (iii) coaching the students’ challenge projects, and (iv) conducting debriefing interviews with the GMOOC team after the program.

The instructional delivery is conducted in three formats and is completed in two weeks. First, students watch all pre-recorded lectures in advance via the XuetangX platform (https://www.xuetangx.com/learn/goc092604/goc092604/9792888/liveunit/15127309). Second, students then participate in themed discussions aligned with the course content, which enhances their understanding of the course materials. Third, students then work in teams to develop
innovative challenge programs collaboratively. The team challenge requires students to propose ways in which positive psychology can be applied to benefit society. Supplementary activities like festival planning meetings, UNESCO collaboration meetings, and debates are also part of students’ learning experiences with the PPRC’s Positive Psychology GMOOC.

All students who complete the program will receive certificates. Each student team’s project is evaluated and scored by the staff members based on innovation and potential social impact. The team receiving the highest score will then be announced as the winner and receive awards. The winning team may also be invited to be mentors for future programs.

**Opportunities For Improvement and Initial Solutions**

**Program Challenges and Opportunities for Development**

The PPRC’s Positive Psychology GMOOC has been running for one year. As a new program, the GMOOC team is satisfied overall and proud of how well the program has been received by the global community. The number of views of the pre-recorded Positive Psychology GMOOC lecture videos has reached 1.6 million views in total, making it the most popular course on the GMOOC platform. While the number of views is considered significant by the service partner, it does not necessarily translate to eventual enrolment and active participation in the GMOOC. By comparison, the positive psychology MOOC offered by the University of Pennsylvania on Coursera has, as of 9th February 2023, 95,230 enrolled, working toward completion of the course and attainment of a certificate (Positive Psychology: Martin E.P. Seligman’s Visionary Science, 2023). Similarly, the Science of Happiness MOOC, offered by the University of California at Berkeley has, as of the same date, 552,547 students enrolled (The Science of Happiness, 2023). Based on direct communications with the PPRC, the team has recruited 100 students from the first term and to date, has successfully trained 500 students.
through the program (Tsinghua University, personal communication, January 17, 2023). Our evaluation of the situation is that there is an opportunity for Tsinghua to scale its program to capture a larger student audience from their positive psychology GMOOC. We emphasize, however, that one way we can do so is by enhancing the student learning experience, thereby differentiating it from other MOOCs available.

Based on our situation analysis, we drew the conclusion that the Tsinghua GMOOC program was using the xMOOC model. From our personal meetings with the Tsinghua PPRC team, we learned that the mentors were mostly professors who were unable to provide personalized or attentive feedback to students’ challenge projects in the part. This led to feelings of lack of support from these professors, who served as mentors for the program (Tsinghua University, personal communication, February 9, 2023). This builds on initial concerns that students in the GMOOC program do not have many opportunities to know one another and to build collaboration-enhancing connections before being tasked with the challenge project. This can also diminish students’ learning experiences with the GMOOC, especially with the presence of the challenge project which frames the learning experience as more competitive than collaborative (Tsinghua University, personal communication, January 19, 2023). We were also told that students from previous GMOOCs stated that they wanted greater connection and attention from mentors and peers. Based on the information we gathered, we identify that there is an opportunity for Tsinghua to enhance student engagement with the content in a way that creates a more participative and rewarding learning experience.

Also, in terms of measurement of the program quality, no quantitative data currently exists regarding the quality of the program and students’ learning experiences. That said, the qualitative feedback shared with us directly from the Tsinghua GMOOC team informs us that
there is an opportunity for fostering greater connections, support, and collaboration with mentors and also with peers during this program. In essence, the GMOOC can incorporate more elements from the cMOOC model than the xMOOC model to foster collaboration and create a more transformative, shared communal learning experience.

**Specific Areas for Improvement**

Our initial analysis indicates three areas for improvement. First, we have noted that there could be a better link between both curriculum and connection. At present, the GMOOC focuses primarily on creating and delivering course content (xMOOC model), with minimal emphasis on how the online learning experience can enhance students’ well-being through fostering connection, belonging, community, and shared meaning (cMOOC model). These concepts can be mapped to a range of concepts in positive psychology that foster and strengthen bonds between individuals. Mattering, for instance, is the feeling of being valued and being able to add value to one’s community (Prilleltensky, 2021) as well as high-quality connections, defined as short-term interactions that are positive subjective experiences and facilitate positive outcomes (Stephens et al., 2012). In short, the GMOOC has yet to incorporate ideas that would help create a loving learning community among its students. Second, given that the GMOOC includes a competitive element in the form of a challenge-based learning project, there is a concern that the learning experience focuses more on “winning” than collaborative learning. This competitive element may be antithetical to fostering a cooperative learning atmosphere online. Third, the positive psychology GMOOC is primarily a passive, rather than active learning experience. Given that the mode of learning involves students watching pre-recorded videos, there is room for improving their learning experience by incorporating more active, interactive, and engaging learning activities through the online platform.
PART 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Through conducting an in-depth situation analysis, we concluded that the Tsinghua Positive Psychology GMOOC program is structured following an xMOOC model, which is teacher-centered, one-way, and relies heavily on self-directed learning. Little emphasis is put on fostering connection, increasing a sense of belonging, community building, or creating shared meaning between students and instructors.

Based on this analysis, we propose that creating a stronger link between the curriculum and connection can enhance both the quality of the GMOOC and students’ learning experiences. Our goal for this service project is to thus help Tsinghua build a community-centered online learning environment, thus helping them move their learning experience from the current xMOOC model to a cMOOC model.

Guided by this goal, we conducted a literature review of the positive psychology literature, highlighting concepts and ideas that suggest ways to enhance relationship-forming and community-building, to enhance Tsinghua’s students’ online learning experience. This literature review will cover four areas: (i) overview of the role of MOOC learning on personal development and well-being, (ii) high-quality connections (HQC), (iii) mattering, and (iv) mutual value theory. These three theories all provide empirical evidence and theoretical rationale in support of enhancing students’ online learning experience and will serve as a guide in designing our activities in the following Application Plan section.

The Role of MOOC Learning on Personal Development and Well-being

MOOCs are an increasingly popular platform for higher education courses (Coursera, 2020). The role of MOOC learning on students’ personal development and well-being has been
investigated. Research generally shows that they confer notable benefits to students’ well-being (Mordor Intelligence, 2022). One reported benefit is that MOOCs provide students greater autonomy in how they utilize and pace their learning compared to courses taught in traditional classroom settings. Additionally, MOOCs provide an equitable, safe, and comfortable environment for disadvantaged students who may have less motivation, fewer learning strategies, less prior knowledge, or higher anxiety during the actual assessments (Hernández Correa & Pérez Sanagustín, 2022). It also enhances students’ self-efficacy and their sense of achievement (Hernández Correa & Pérez Sanagustín, 2022). Other research shows that MOOC learning can enhance students’ perceptions of self-development and self-awareness and these positive experiences are shaped primarily by teacher capability and course quality (Pan et al., 2022).

Although these benefits of MOOC learning have been reported, their limitations have also been recognized. One major challenge of online learning is the lack of opportunities for students to create informal, in-person social connections with peers and teachers. Faculty and staff are unable to interact with students in closer and more frequent ways, thus decreasing the possibility to build trust and positive emotions, both of which are essential for building high-quality connections (Atkins, 2020). Additionally, online learning limits the building of a positive climate through interactions such as smiling, laughing, or engaging in small talk (Kaufman & Vallade, 2022). Consequently, students may feel little or no sense of community or belongingness from their learning experiences on MOOCs. This can increase students’ sense of loneliness and isolation, or worse, create the impression that it is risky to speak up and actively participate in the learning process.

Establishing positive relationships as well within an online learning community is thus crucial in facilitating student learning and enhancing student well-being. The quality of the
relationship and sense of community both have a direct impact on students’ motivation to participate and communicate in class (McCroskey et al., 2006).

Studies have shown that compared to in-person learning, students who attend online learning experience significantly higher levels of stress and loneliness, more negative emotions, and lower levels of concentration, motivation, and academic performance (Besser et al., 2022). A key reason for this is that students studying online perceive themselves as being less connected with peers, which leads to lower levels of engagement compared to students who study in-person (Vaillancourt et al., 2022). This is because students’ learning and participation in the classroom are both content- and relationally-driven (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Students are motivated to learn not just to acquire knowledge but also to develop deeper relationships with their teachers (McCroskey et al., 2006). The relational reasons behind students’ motivation include a desire to get to know teachers on a personal level, to demonstrate knowledge of the course material, and to make a favorable impression on the teacher (Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 2002). Increasing students’ interaction with teachers and students has been found to increase students' self-motivation and self-regulation, which as a result will enhance students’ academic student performance in MOOCs learning (García Espinosa et. al., 2015).

In summary, online learning can face limitations caused by a lack of in-person interaction or weak relationships and connections with teachers or classmates. However, this limitation can be addressed by providing opportunities for more interaction and engagement, which lead to increased students’ self-motivation or self-regulation. These interactions can take the form of office hours, small group discussions, peer-to-peer feedback opportunities, as well as social networking (García Espinosa et. al., 2015). The instructional design of MOOC learning is critical in determining the overall quality of learning experiences. Therefore, we believe that with
evidence-informed interactive instructional design, MOOCs can fulfill students’ learning needs, sense of connectivity, membership, and sense of belonging in their learning communities. Therefore, we recommend that MOOCs can be designed in an interactive way to meet students’ relational and learning needs.

**High-Quality Connections**

The term high-quality connections (HQC) was first coined by Dr. Jane Dutton and her colleagues. HQCs refer to dyadic relationships that are characterized by three factors: (i) mutual positive regard, (ii) mutual trust, and (iii) active engagement from both parties in the relationship (Dutton, 2003). Research indicates that HQCs are essential for enhancing the learning process through the creation of psychological safety. Psychological safety is the belief that one is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999), which is an essential element for facilitating learning (Edmondson et al. 2014). Carmeli and his colleagues (2009) found that HQCs lead to increases in psychological safety, which encourage students to engage in more reflection and prompt more deliberation and care in understanding their organization’s work processes. Brueller and Carmeli (2011) also find that learning is enhanced when team members feel psychologically safe toward both their peers and crucially, toward their manager. The importance of HQCs in fostering connections and lowering perceived power imbalances is evident in leader-follower (or in the case of online learning, student-instructor) relationships (Brueller & Carmeli, 2011).

HQC promotes positive outcomes in the workplace, including increased employee engagement, openness, and self-efficacy. Importantly, HQCs are vitalizing relationships. When individuals experience HQCs, they report feelings of vitality which in turn, lead to elevated work performance (Carmeli, 2009). Dutton (2017) suggests that the impact of HQCs can also permeate
organizational levels, creating a positivity resonance that builds capacities for adaptation, learning, and resilience. Similarly, Baker and Dutton (2007) propose HQCs are an important foundation for building positive social capital across groups and teams. Lack of HQCs may lead to lower psychological safety and respectful engagement, thus potentially impacting learning.

Therefore, fostering HQCs is a key component of designing a healthy, and psychologically rewarding online learning environment. Research has generated various methods and strategies on how to facilitate HQCs. Some strategies include being present, affirming, communicating, and listening to others in a way that acknowledges and conveys appreciation for their worth (Dutton, 2003; Stephens et al., 2012). Stephens and his colleagues (2012) also propose three mechanisms on how to create HQCs: (i) cognitive (other-awareness, impressions of others, perspective taking), (ii) emotional (positive emotions, emotional contagion, empathy), and (iii) behavioral (respective engagement, task enabling, play). Other recommended strategies include ‘caring questioning’ through inviting and prompting others to offer appreciative questions that then led to both help-seeking and help-giving (Aarrestad et al., 2015). Being afforded opportunities to ask questions and to offer answers is crucial in facilitating the learning experience in organizational contexts (Aarrestad et al., 2015).

Other ways to create better connections with students through online learning include providing additional services virtually outside of coursework such as organizing virtual social gatherings and events and using social media sites to further connect their community (Atkins, 2020). Kaufmann and Vallade (2022) propose several ways to improve rapport building and the positive climate in online learning. Course design and structure, particularly with interactive and engaging elements, can convey a positive climate to students before the start of the course. By engaging in positive communication and being approachable, supportive, respectful, engaging,
understanding, and responsive, instructors can also improve the climate and build better rapport with students. Being mindful of the limitations of interactions online and leveraging technology to improve the experience can also be effective ways of fostering student engagement with their learning communities. Applying HQCs principles to the Tsinghua Positive Psychology GMOOC program, we propose implementing a positive introductions activity, where we encourage students to introduce themselves using uplifting personal stories that pave the way for respectful engagement.

**Mattering**

*Mattering* is a theory that was first developed by Dr. Issac Prilleltensky and his wife Ora Prilleltensky. Mattering is based on the premise that in any kind of organization be they business or schools, people matter first. To be more specific, people’s feelings and well-being matter more than the business or performance itself (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). *Value* is a core concept in mattering, and feeling valued is crucial in making people matter. This condition of people matter can be created through two complementary psychological states: (i) feeling valued, and (ii) adding value (Prilleltensky, 2020). *Feeling valued* means “being appreciated, respected, and recognized.” *Adding value* means “making a contribution and making a difference in the world” (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021, p. 5).

Both types of values are important and can directly impact people’s relationships, work, and communities. When both values are fulfilled, it can increase people’s psychological well-being such as feeling appreciated, acknowledged, and respected (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Mattering is crucial for our physical health, psychological well-being, sense of belonging, happiness, agency, self-acceptance, meaning, and growth (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Davidson and Cotter (1991) found that mattering is strongly related to subjective well-being.
Flett (2018) states that mattering helps improve relationships, engagement, and resilience in communities. Jung and Heppner’s (2017) study shows that a sense of mattering significantly enhances meaning, commitment, and positive emotions within the context of work communities. Other studies show that mattering positively correlates with desirable outcomes, including psychological and physical well-being, well-being, longevity, resilience, vitality, and happiness (Prilleltensky, 2020). Studies also indicate that mattering explains the relationship between fairness and well-being (Scarpa et al., 2021) and is essential in promoting perceptions of justice and well-being (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021).

Feeling valued encourages individuals to act prosocially, rewarding them with a sense of recognition and satisfaction (Prilleltensky, 2020). Feeling valued increases feelings of self-acceptance (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Adding value motivates individuals to make a difference, which also benefits self-efficacy and meaning (Prilleltensky, 2020), and fosters a sense of belongingness (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). When an individual cares for the self, it is called “me culture.” When each individual cares for the community and adds value to the community, it is called “We Culture” (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). We culture has been shown to help establish justice and fairness in a community which leads to better well-being (Prilleltensky, 2020). One study shows that mattering mediates the relationship between fairness and well-being (Prilleltensky, 2020). People who live in more socially just countries report higher life satisfaction. Fair and just communities, therefore, increase perceived mattering and ultimately, well-being (Di Martino & Prilleltensky, 2020).

To build healthy communities, maintaining a balance or an equilibrium between these two values is essential. When the equilibrium between the two is achieved, it can subsequently create a virtuous cycle that enhances both individual-level and also community-level well-being.
(Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). For communities to flourish, it is important to create a balance between self and others, feeling valued and adding value, and fairness and wellness (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Collectively, when a sense of equilibrium is created, it contributes toward the building of the ‘We Culture’ (Prilleltensky, 2020), which we believe is essential in building a healthy online learning community.

Therefore, mattering is a crucial factor that should be considered in online learning (Vaillancourt et al., 2022). Students who feel a sense of mattering are more protected and resilient. They also show more positive reactions and learning adaptability and are more engaged in their studies (Besser et al., 2022). When students feel a sense of belongingness and mattering, they are more confident, optimistic, and resilient, and experience higher levels of enjoyment, concentration, and openness with online learning (Besser et al., 2022).

In sum, creating a sense of mattering is a pathway to enhance students’ learning experiences online (Besser et al., 2022). Mattering is relevant in promoting motivation, and academic resilience and ultimately, elevating the online learning experience. These desirable positive outcomes are a call to make mattering an essential focus in the design of online learning.

Applying the principles of mattering to the Tsinghua GMOOC program, we can help them build an online learning community by adopting the We Culture as a way of enhancing students’ learning experiences. For example, we as mentors can strive to be inclusive with all participants, ensure fairness in the community, and thereby create a sense of community and belonging. We will also establish respectful listening norms in the community, inviting and encouraging all members of the learning community to voice their views and opinions, collectively contributing to a meaningfully-shared learning experience for all members.

**Mutual Value Theory**
Mutual value theory was developed by Dr. Dengting Boyanton through a two-year qualitative study. Boyanton (2014) conducted intensive classroom observations and individual interviews with students and teachers. Two professors and four courses, across two graduate and two undergraduate courses, were observed from the Summer 2005 to Spring 2006 semesters at a large public American university located on the east coast of the U.S. Data collection and analysis followed Glaser and Strauss’ grounded theory approach (Creswell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A total of sixty hours of fieldwork were spent in the field.

The key question driving Boyanton’s (2014) work was, “How can positive relationships and community in the classroom setting in higher education be created? She found that an essential part of the answer to this question is value. Value is defined as our subjective overall evaluation or perception of ourselves, others, or a certain target. This evaluation or perception ranges from negative to positive and can also be quantified into 10 different levels (Appendix 1, Figure 1; Boyanton, 2014).

The direction (positive or negative) of this subjective value and its amount positively correlates with the degrees of positivity in relationships and communities. The higher value one assigns to others is thus reflective of how positive the relationship is. The subjectively-assigned value will first influence one’s attitudes, which in turn, influences motivation. Motivations, consequently, influence behaviors and finally, outcomes (see Appendix 1, Figure 2; Boyanton, 2014). Using value as the core theme, Boyanton (2014) linked the various factors and developed a new dynamic and multi-factorial theory—mutual value theory.

Within any community, each participant will be both a valuer and a valuee. Participants both assign value to other participants and are also targets of such value assignment by others.
and themselves. Depending on the valuer and value differences, there are a total of four types of values, depicted in Table 1 (Boyanton, 2014).

**Table 1.**

*Types of Values*

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<th>Valuer/Valuee</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Self-value</td>
<td>Other-value</td>
<td>Course-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Perceived self-value</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Due to the focus of this paper, the term course-value is not discussed in this paper.

**Self-value.** Self-value refers to how people see themselves and how much they value themselves as a person. Some similar psychological concepts are self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), self-esteem (Abdel-Khalek, 2016), and self-confidence (Harris, 2011). Student self-value refers to a student’s evaluations of themselves as a person and includes evaluations of whether they are a valuable person, good student, or possess positive qualities. Only when a student has high self-value will they be emotionally and psychologically at ease. They will also feel secure sharing with others and have confidence in, participating and engaging in the learning environment (Boyanton, 2014).

**Perceived self-value.** Perceived self-value refers to a person’s perception of how others value them as a person. This includes the degree one perceives that the other values him/her as a person, and to what degree the individual perceives that the other believes in him/her. Perceived self-value impacts students’ motivation and comfort level in opening up and participating (Boyanton, 2014).

**Other-value.** Other-value refers to the degree to which one values others (Boyanton, 2014). When students value the teacher as competent and trustworthy, they tend to relate to the
teacher more positively and feel more comfortable sharing their ideas which leads to better learning in students (McCroskey & Richmond, 1992; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999; Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004).

Applying these values in a learning community setting, the relationships among them can be illustrated in Appendix 1, Figure 3. As shown in Figure 3, each smaller circle on the larger circle represents one participant in a community. Each participant has three types of values (self-value, perceived self-value, and other-value). When all three types of values are created in each participant, a positive community with positive relationships is created (Boyanton, 2014). The sense of value is, we propose, another important factor to incorporate into an online learning setting.

Ever since its establishment in 2007, mutual value theory has been implemented by Boyanton and her colleagues in the actual classroom teaching experiences and has also produced a positive impact on the student-teacher relationship, community building, learning, and student in-class communication (Boyanton, 2009, 2011, 2014; Sullivan et al., 2021; Wang, et al., 2020, 2021; Xie et al., 2018). In addition, mutual value theory has also been reviewed as effective by other scholars (Cohen, 2016; Stillsano, 2015). Mutual value theory has also been applied to both blended learning format and also completed online learning format (Boyanton, 2011).

Applying mutual value theory to the Tsinghua Positive Psychology GMOOC program, we might propose an activity called *community of respect*. For this activity, all students will sit together and take turns contributing up to three rules that will ensure that each member will be valued in the online community. The class as a group will discuss and approve each rule one by one. Then the instructor will compile these together as class community rules.

**Conclusion**
We conducted an extensive literature review to develop a comprehensive understanding of the theories and concepts that positively influence relationship-forming and community-building. We first reviewed the role of MOOC learning on personal development and well-being in terms of its benefits and limitations. We then reviewed three theoretical frameworks which are most directly relevant in meeting the needs of our service learning partner: high-quality connections, mattering, and mutual value theory. We provided defining and then detailing the evidence and theoretical arguments for how each contributes to the creation of positive relationships and community within the context of online learning. We believe that all three theories are relevant to the creation of healthy relationships and a positive online community. They are beneficial not just for students’ learning, but also for their well-being. In the following section, the Application Plan, we will provide more detailed application plans with methods, activities, and strategies for Tsinghua’s Positive Psychology GMOOC program. Suggestions and guidelines on how to transform the Tsinghua MOOC program from the current existing xMOOC model to a more interactive and relational cMOOC model will also be provided in the next part, the Application Plan.

PART 3: APPLICATION PLAN

Overview

Based on the initial goal of assisting Tsinghua in moving from the current xMOOC toward a cMOOC model to create a more interactive, relational, engaging, and transformative learning experience for students and also based on our literature review, we developed our application plan. Specifically, our application plan will provide a total of six interventions to help build high-quality connections, increase a sense of mattering, and enhance mutual value. These six interventions are contextualized to the online learning environment and also tailored
specifically for the demographic of students enrolled in the Tsinghua Positive Psychology GMOOC. Ultimately, we hope these interventions can help enhance students’ learning experiences, and hopefully, create ripples of positivity that complement Tsinghua University’s goal of improving the well-being of 10% of the Chinese population.

**Intervention Plan Part 1: High-quality Connections**

The first interventions for high-quality connections draw on Dutton’s (2003) ideas on respectful engagement. Respectful engagement involves interacting with others in ways that express appreciation of others’ worth, positive regard, and that others matter (Dutton, 2003). We tailor our plans toward building respectful engagement specific to online interactions.

**Intervention 1a: HQCs Virtual Theatre Workshop**

For this intervention, we will provide an hour-long HQCs virtual theatre workshop to the Tsinghua GMOOC Team. The HQCs virtual theatre workshop will take four steps.

**Step 1: Warm-up.** We will have the Tsinghua GMOOC Team work in pairs, assign them to different zoom breakout rooms, and each pair will brainstorm on questions: What are the key characteristics of high-quality connections? How do you know if it is a high-quality connection?

**Step 2: Workshop.** We will provide a brief workshop introducing the five features of HQCs: (i) conveying presence, (ii) being genuine, (iii) communicating affirmation, (iv) effective listening, and (v) supportive communication.

**Step 3: Role modeling.** We will role-model the characteristics of HQCs as well as specific techniques including referring to individuals by name, paying attention to speakers, being attentive to and acknowledging emotions conveyed through the speaker’s non-verbal cues, and responding kindly to all interacting parties online (High & Dillard, 2012). We will ask them to pay particular attention to how the mentors incorporate supportive and affirmative non-verbal
cues including portraying direct facial orientation, providing eye contact, expressing positive emotion in online interactions (Walther et al., 2005), and nodding in affirmation to feedback (Aburumman et al., 2022). We will also emphasize the use of motivational prosody – voice that is autonomy-supporting, to help meet relatedness and belongingness needs in online settings (Paulmann & Weinstein, 2022).

**Step 4: Performing.** After the workshop, each team will enter their private virtual theater (breakout rooms). To create a theater-like atmosphere, we will name each breakout room as “theater.” We can also assign different roles to the team members. For example, we can have four people in one group with one being the director, two being actors, and one being the critic. Each team will be given a scenario to act out. They are reminded to pay particular attention to adopting a person-centered HQCs approach to communication, conveying messages that acknowledge, legitimize, accept, and empathize with the emotions of another (Burleson, 2009). At the end of the performance, the coach will provide constructive feedback on how to better create higher HQCs. This process can be repeated by having them switch roles.

**Intervention 1b: Positive Introductions**

This intervention aims to kickstart the creation of sustainable HQCs for students. Building on evidence that ‘positivity begets positivity,’ (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018), we design two follow-up interventions aimed at encouraging students to practice respectful engagement and nurture HQCs. This intervention will take three steps.

**Step 1: Complete the VIA Character Strengths Survey.** We will have students complete the VIA Character Strengths Survey (https://www.viacharacter.org/), which will be administered a month before the program starts.
**Step 2: Positive introduction write-up.** Students will be asked to write a positive introduction. This introduction will include their background, but most importantly, their top five signature strengths. Students will also be required to include a story on how they used their strengths to overcome a previous challenge (Niemiec, 2018). A sample of positive introductions will be provided to the students in advance before the program starts.

**Step 3: Positive introduction presentation.** Before the students present themselves during the first synchronous orientation, mentors will model positive introductions while continuing to role-model the features of HQCs and person-centered communication. Then students will take turns presenting their positive introduction to the whole group in class. Smaller breakouts can be organized to accommodate large student numbers.

**Intervention Plan Part 2: Mattering**

Prilleltensky (2020) defines mattering as individuals’ need to feel valued and to add value to themselves, their relationships, their work, and their community. Mattering has been shown to increase individuals’ sense of community, belongingness, engagement, and positive emotions (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Within the context of online learning, this would mean that students feel valued, respected, recognized, and appreciated by the GMOOC learning community. By adding value, students make contributions to themselves, their cohorts, and the community. To foster a sense of mattering, we design the following two interventions:

**Intervention 2a: “WE Culture” Norms**

In the Tsinghua GMOOC program, we will convey and establish “We Culture" norms for an online community (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Paluck et al. (2016) point out that individuals strive to understand the social norms in a community and adjust their behaviors accordingly. Building these “We Culture” norms can help students understand what is advocated
in the GMOOC community and adjust their behaviors to enhance opportunities to feel valued in and add value to the community. When students understand and internalize these “We Culture” norms, positive community-wide behaviors will emerge (Paluck et al., 2016). This intervention will be conducted in below fours steps.

**Step 1: Modeling "We Culture" norms.** Before conducting this activity, it helps to have the facilitators commit to modeling "We Culture" norms to students throughout the entire learning experience. This ensures that every student continually feels psychologically safe throughout their entire learning online (Catyanadika & Rajasekera, 2022). Facilitators can be gently reminded to act as inclusive hosts, with the ultimate goal of facilitating the online learning community's wellness and fairness.

**Step 2: “We Culture” vs. “Me Culture”.** At the start of this activity, facilitators will spend 10 minutes introducing the concept of the “We Culture”, and the norms associated with such a culture. This includes (i) other people matter (ii) non-judgment, (iii) respect, (iv) reciprocity, (v) responsibility, and (vi) encouragement (Peterson, 2006; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Facilitators can also emphasize the differences between a “We Culture” and “Me Culture” before inviting students to share their perspectives about the characteristics of a “We Culture”. For example, in the “Me Culture,” people will say: “I have the right to feel valued by others so that I may experience wellness.”; while in the “We Culture”, people will say: “We all have the right and responsibility to feel valued and add value, to ourselves and others, so that we may all experience wellness and fairness.” (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021).

**Step 3: Generating “We Culture” norms in cohorts.** After the introduction of the differences between the “We” and “Me” cultures, assign students to small breakout rooms with their cohorts. They will discuss and generate their cohorts’ “We Culture” norms that they will
practice during the whole online learning interaction. Students will then be asked to write down their “We Culture” norms on paper so that these can be shared with the larger group once the breakout sessions conclude.

**Step 4: Sharing “We Culture” norms.** When students return to the main group with all other students, facilitators will encourage them to share their cohorts’ “We Culture” norms. Facilitators will take note of, and highlight “We Culture” norms that are noteworthy or unique to the student cohorts that generated them.

**Intervention 2b: Generating Team Visions**

After students form their project team, we will help them create a compelling team vision. The purpose of this intervention is to help the team establish a clear vision of what they want to achieve as a group (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). A compelling vision can remind students why they are together and prevent mission drift (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021).

**Step 1: Exploring dreams.** Students will first be assigned to separate breakout rooms as cohorts. Facilitators will help students explore their "dreams" of applying positive psychology in the real world. The process of "dreaming" includes stimulating conversations about passionate thinking and the creation of positive images (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Both the vision and the dream are, in essence, expressions of a positive, aspirational goal that students hold upon enrolling in the GMOOC. Research indicates that having shared learning goals can encourage students to share knowledge and reduce dropout rates from online learning environments (Sun & Chen, 2016).

**Step 2: Forming team visions:** To help students form their team vision, we will ask them the following questions: (i) Why did you decide to participate in this MOOC/online program? (ii) What goals do you wish to achieve during the learning process? (iii) How do you think your
learning experiences from this area (e.g., psychology/business/economics) and new ideas can impact the world? (iv) How would you like to apply your learning in the real world? (v) How does your application help make the world a better place?

**Step 3: Writing the visions.** After the team discusses their dream, we will help them generate and write a clear, compelling vision of their teams. This vision will guide their collaborative efforts throughout the whole online learning program. It also helps them hold in mind how they can apply positive psychology to their communities after completing their online course.

**Step 4: Sharing the visions.** When students go back to the main group, each cohort will then be encouraged to present their cohort’ “team vision” in the main group. Facilitators highlight the compelling visions shared by each team and pay particular attention to the strengths and uniqueness of each team’s vision statement and learning goals.

**Intervention Plan Part 3: Mutual Value**

Based on mutual value theory, a positive relationship and community is built when three types of values are created between or among the participants: (i) self-value, (ii) perceived self-value, and (iii) other-value (Boyanton, 2011; 2014). We propose cultivating mutual value through two interventions:

**Intervention 3a: I Have A Dream Speech**

For this intervention, the GMOOC students will be asked to select a social challenge or social problem. This intervention is called “I have a dream,” inspired by Martin Luther King’s (King, 2012) speech of the same name. This intervention will have four steps.

**Step 1. Our World.** Two weeks before the program starts, we will ask students to write down their ideal world as well as the social problems faced by society today. This activity design
helps students think of the broader aims of their participation in the GMOOC, and help them express their values and how they can contribute meaningfully to their communities and the world at large.

**Step 2. King’s Dream.** To inspire the students’ thinking, we will play Martin Luther King’s I have a dream speech video before students’ sharing on the first day of the orientation.

**Step 3. My Dream.** On the first day of the orientation, students will be assigned to small breakout rooms with their team members. They will take turns sharing their dreams (2-3 minutes for each person).

**Step 4. Our Dreams.** Finally, with students’ permission, we will collect everybody’s dreams together with their photos, signature strengths, and background information. We will compile all the collected information together into a digital file called *Our Dreams*. This file will be shared with the whole class, allowing them to read and acknowledge each other’s dreams and challenges before engaging with each other in the online learning experience. We expect the intervention to encourage students to learn about each other’s values and passions, acknowledge others’ value, and also foster connections with each other through shared values. Students will be able to better understand their peers and be more confident introducing themselves with their speeches on the first day of the GMOOC. In addition, this intervention will also help students develop a stronger view of self through writing about their future dreams and imaging their future self.

**Intervention 3b: Blind Date**

This intervention will be conducted on the first day of the program’s orientation and follows after the “I have a dream” intervention. This intervention will have four steps.
**Step 1. Pair students.** First, we will pair students up in advance based on similar dreams and challenges. During the GMOOC orientation, we will then assign each pair to a Zoom breakout room and have them interact with each other as if they were on a blind date.

**Step 2. Conduct interviews.** Students will take turns interviewing each other, and ask, “If you don’t have to work or study right now, and money is not an issue, where would you be and what would you be doing? With whom? And why?” Students take turns answering this question.

**Step 3. Sharing session.** Students will share their values, qualities, virtues, and passion with their blind date. Indeed, self-disclosure of one’s personal qualities is an effective way to enhance the trust and acceptance of individuals and may be especially effective when the disclosure revolves around sensitive topics (Dutton et al., 2019).

**Step 4. Express mutual appreciation.** The pair of students will discover qualities they like about each other and also feel appreciated by each other. Ideally, after this intervention, the paired students will establish a deep and enduring connection with each other, which will serve as a solid affective foundation for their upcoming collaborations throughout the GMOOC.

**Measurement Plan**

To measure whether our proposed interventions have a positive impact on students’ GMOOC experience – both in terms of relationship and learning quality, we will use the Connection and Relationship Assessment Tool. This measurement tool combines items from Carmeli et al.’s (2009) measure of HQCs and Albelbisi’s (2020) MOOC success scale (MOOC-SS) – both measures are reliable at $\alpha \geq .72$. The measure assesses, using students’ self-ratings, their connections with their GMOOC peers on a 5-point Likert scale ($1 = $ Strongly Disagree, $5 = $ Strongly Agree). This measurement will be collected twice at two time points, T1, at the start of GMOOC, after students first interact with one another, and T2, after they have completed the
GMOOC. Data analysis will employ a one-sample dependent sample t-test to compare the mean score before and after the program. The Connection and Relationship Assessment Tool is presented in Appendix B – Application Materials.

To assess whether our intervention has a positive impact on students’ quality of learning, we will collect students’ assignments, projects, and final grades from the GMOOC team. Since this program followed an xMOOC model last year, we will compare the current intake’s learning performance with the previous year’s students’ grades. Using the datasets from these two different intakes, we will run independent samples t-tests to compare the standardized mean score of final grades between last year’s group (xMOOC) and the current group (cMOOC). We hypothesize that there will be a statistically significant difference between the two intakes. We predict that the current student group following a cMOOC model will score higher on learning outcomes than last year’s group.

Limitations

We acknowledge that our application plan can have several limitations when we apply theoretical concepts and scientific findings to the real world. First of all, from a contextual standpoint, the online nature of the GMOOC limits our options for the types of interventions that can be implemented. Interactions between students and instructors will be limited to video, chat, and email interfaces. Thus, the interventions must be achievable through these online tools. In addition, the GMOOC team comprises educators and administrators who do not have a background or deep understanding of positive psychology. They may require additional guidance and suggestions to align with our proposed application plan.

Secondly, there are limiting factors due to the course design as well. The course format and materials have already been decided by Tsinghua and the GMOOC team. We are thus unable
to implement a change from an xMOOC to a cMOOC model in terms of the syllabus, course content, and lesson plans. We can only propose limited changes to the process by which the online sessions are delivered.

Lastly, since the majority student population will be Chinese, the social norms of the student population should be considered. Culturally, Chinese students have high academic pressure to perform well in school (Gao et al., 2020). Parental anxiety related to students’ academic achievement can add to this pressure. Gender and age equity can also become an issue in the Chinese social context. As English might not be the native language for most students, there may also be a potential language barrier. Nuances in terminology and phrasing may be lost in translation. Therefore, we must be mindful that any research that we leverage that is focused on the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) population should be carefully considered when applying to the Tsinghua student population. At the same time, as a global course offering, we also need to be inclusive of all cultures and need to ensure that the approach is not too customized to the Chinese student population.

Summary

To sum up, from our situation analysis, we concluded that the Tsinghua Positive Psychology GMOOC program is structured following an xMOOC model. To assist Tsinghua in moving from the xMOOC toward a cMOOC model to help them create a more interactive, relational, engaging, and transformative learning experience for students, we have designed our application plan which aims to build high-quality connections, increase a sense of mattering, and enhance mutual value.

Using the three theoretical frameworks (HQC, mattering, and mutual value theory) as our guidelines, we have designed a total of six interventions (two for each theoretical
framework): (i) HQCs Virtual Theatre Workshop, (ii) Positive Introduction, (iii), “ME Culture” Vs. “WE Culture”: The Great Debate, (iv) Generating A Team Vision, (v) I Have a Dream Speech and (6) Blind Date. Specific steps and guidelines on how to implement these interventions in the actual online settings are provided. Potential limitations when applying these interventions in the actual setting are also addressed.

We believe that these six proposed interventions will support the GMOOC team in creating a highly engaging learning experience and building a strong and respectful student community. We also hope that the GMOOC team will be able to leverage their newfound knowledge of positive psychology and high-quality connections in the future, as they further develop and grow the community of interest in positive psychology.
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APPENDIX A

Figure 1.

*Levels of Value in Mutual Value Theory*

![Diagram of Levels of Value in Mutual Value Theory]

Figure 2.

*Impact of Value on Mutual Value Theory*
Figure 3.

Relationship of Value in Mutual Value Theory
APPENDIX B – APPLICATION MATERIALS (HANDBOOK)

From xMOOCs to cMOOCs

A How-to for Using Positive Psychology to Build Supportive, Engaging, and Effective Online Learning Experiences

Prepared for the 2023 Tsinghua University Positive Psychology GMOOC by

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Introduction

The popularity and demand for Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) continue to grow worldwide, with a market value and size estimated to be US$7 billion by 2027 (Businesswire, 2022). MOOCs present opportunities to the global student population, offering them continued learning for professional and personal development. The success of MOOCs, however, depends partly on the model in which the learning content is delivered.

MOOC models can be broadly divided into one of two categories. In an xMOOC (extended massive open online course) model, learning revolves around a teacher-instructed model, whereby students learn from teaching materials (typically pre-recorded video lectures) at their own pace with minimal interactions with instructors or other learners. By comparison, in a cMOOC (connective massive open online course) model, learning and the transfer of knowledge and skills arise from the experience of a shared, co-creation of knowledge between instructors and fellow learners in the online environment. Most commercialized MOOCs adopt an xMOOC model, though models that effectively combine both the scale of xMOOCs with the interactivity of the cMOOC can enhance the enrollment, effectiveness, and completion of students enrolled in online courses (Fidalgo-Blanco et al., 2016). As one author puts it simply, “If we want to enhance online learning, we need to enhance online learner participation.” (Hrastinski, 2009).

If we want to enhance online learning, we need to enhance online learning participation.

Further, additional interactivity is a crucial component of more learner-centric MOOC models, which have been shown to promote active learning and increase course completion rates (Shah et al., 2022). As such, MOOCs – especially those which are primarily based on the xMOOC model, benefit from activities and interventions that enhance the interactivity and communal learning experience of students in online contexts. Research indicates that building and fostering quality relationships online can help increase psychological safety (Brueller & Carmeli, 2011), cultivate a sense of adaptability and engagement with the learning material (Besser et al., 2022), and enhance the quality of the classroom learning experience (Boyanton, 2011).

About The Handbook

This handbook started as a service learning project component for a course in the Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) program at the University of Pennsylvania, United States, in collaboration with Tsinghua University, China. The interventions are designed to assist with transforming Tsinghua University’s Positive Psychology Global Massive Open Online Course from an xMOOC to a cMOOC model. The guidelines, suggestions, and activities provided here, can however, with adaptation, be easily applied to enhance the learning experience of students in any other online course or virtual classroom setting.

This handbook uses evidence-informed approaches from positive psychology, offering ideas on how to transform the program from xMOOCs to cMOOCs. The ‘active ingredients’ informing these activities are positive psychology principles relevant to strengthening positive relationships.
among the students, as well as between students and teachers. The handbook also draws on evidence from the broader psychological literature, from emerging research on character strengths (Niemiec, 2019) to established areas of research such as goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2002) and Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperider et al., 2008) to bolster suggestions for building positive relationships in online learning environments. Activities and techniques suggested in this workbook can be employed before the commencement of students’ learning and throughout their online engagement with peers and course instructors/teaching assistants.

The six activities included in this handbook are divided into three concepts relevant to enhancing student engagement in online learning platforms:

1. High-quality Connections (HQC) s
2. Mattering and a ‘WE culture’
3. Mutual Value

Incorporating these activities and interventions can help enhance the MOOC experience to one that is more engaging and enhancing not just for learning, but also the well-being of students.

**How to Use This Handbook**

In this handbook, each activity is accompanied by a series of guiding icons that make it easy to incorporate positive psychology into the online learning experience:

| Objective: The key aims, goals, and specifics of the activity. |
| Time Requirements: The amount of time needed to complete the activity. |
| Items: Any supplementary materials (e.g., printouts, supplementary materials) required for the activity. |
| Key Learning Outcome: The key transferable skill or ability which the activity aims to improve. |

Self-Disclosure: The amount of personal sharing or disclosure expected of participants. Since personal sharing is part of building supportive connections, we detail the extent of sharing required from participants here where ✻ = minimal to no self-disclosure to ✻✻✻✻✻ = high level of self-disclosure needed.

Activity Steps: Detailed step-by-step guides on how to employ the activity.

**Optional Reflection and Discussion Questions:** Additional reflection or discussion questions to complement the activity.

**Further Reading:** References to help the facilitator deepen their understanding and the theoretical basis for the activity.

**Tips and Tricks:** Suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of the activity.

The activities can be used independently of each other to suit the online learning requirements of participants or the learning experience that instructors and facilitators wish to create in their online classes. There is no need to follow the sequence in which they are presented, though facilitators
may wish to select an activity that encourages a comfortable level of self-disclosure from participants at the start of the learning experience or to match the activities to the broader learning goals of students based on their syllabus or learning plan. Handbook Appendix A presents a sample positive introduction to accompany one of the activities and a glossary of key terms used in this handbook is presented in Handbook Appendix B.

Terms Used in This Handbook

- **Facilitator, Instructor, Mentor:** In this handbook, we use the term facilitator to refer to the individual whose role is to guide and oversee the running of the activities – i.e., the individual who assumes the instructional or mentoring roles in the online learning environment. As such, the term is synonymous with ‘instructor,’ or ‘mentor’ for this handbook.

- **Breakout Rooms:** We use the term breakout rooms to describe smaller groups that can be set up using features on many online meeting apps such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The name of this function may vary slightly depending on the learning platform used for online learning.

- **Synchronous:** We refer to synchronous here as live, real-time learning sessions held in the online class. This is contrasted with asynchronous learning, where the learning is self-directed by the student, and does not occur concurrently in the same space or time online. The activities suggested are designed to be run in synchronous sessions, though where possible, we suggest an alternative variation of the activity that could also be run asynchronously.

A Note on Scalability of the Activities

As a general suggestion based on previous experience, the activities will work optimally for a ratio of 25 participants to 1 facilitator, with a suggested minimum of 4 participants and a maximum of 40-50 participants per facilitator. It is important to note that, to the best of our knowledge, no ideal ‘ratio’ of learner-instructor has been prescribed for online classes, and that optimal learning outcomes are more dependent on the frequency of interactivity and feedback from instructors to learners (Ladyshesky, 2013, Mazzolini & Maddison, 2003).

The scalability of the activities and the optimal effectiveness of these activities thus depend on more than just the number of facilitators available to guide students through the activities. Rather, optimal learning and interaction outcomes will also depend on the frequency of learner-instructor interactions. Several activities will require learners to interact in pairs, upon hearing instructions for the activities conveyed by the facilitators. In these instances, a collaborative learning experience will be fostered by peer-to-peer, instead of student-to-instructor interactions.

As an alternative to wide-scale implementation, the activities can also be implemented for just a select group of learners who would prefer to experience greater interactivity in their online learning experience. Offering learners the choice between a more traditional xMOOC experience or a more collaborative cMOOC experience can enhance their autonomy - an essential factor in motivating participation and completion of online courses (Martin et al., 2018).
Part 1: Building High-Quality Connections Online

*Your presence is the most precious gift you can give to another human being.*

- Marshall Rosenberg

**Overview**

High-quality connections (HQC) are dyadic, one-on-one whereby interacting parties hold positive mutual regard for one another, trust one another, and continue to actively engage with each other (Dutton, 2003). HQCs are essential for building psychological safety – the belief that one can take interpersonal risks (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). In the context of online learning, this tends to include feeling safe enough to voice, share, and contribute to the online learning experience. This is essential in a cMOOC model. Research shows that HQCs build psychological safety and facilitate learning (Edmondson, 1999). One way to build HQCs is via respectful engagement – ways of interacting with another that expresses appreciation for the other’s worth, convey positive regard, and that others matter (Dutton, 2003).

**Activity 1a: Positive Introductions**

This activity aims to kickstart the creation of sustainable HQCs for students. Building on evidence that ‘positivity begets positivity,’ (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018), this activity is aimed at encouraging students to practice respectful engagement and nurture HQCs.

| **Objective:** To help students establish a positive self and create initial positive connections with one other |
| **Time Requirements:** 2-3 minutes for each student, total activity time depends on the number of students enrolled. |
| **Items:** VIA Character Strengths Profile. Sample positive introductions from the authors can be found in Handbook Appendix A. |
| **Key Learning Outcome:** Recognition of one’s and others’ character strengths. |

**Self-Disclosure: ***

**Activity Steps:**

1. Before the start of the course, students will be asked to complete the VIA Character Strengths Survey (https://www.viacharacter.org/). They will be asked to note their signature strengths from the Character Strengths profile generated – i.e., their top 5 strengths so that they will be ready to share them with their peers when they meet each other online for the first time.

2. Students will be asked to write a positive introduction using their VIA Character Strengths profile. This introduction will include their background, but importantly, highlight their top five signature strengths. Students can also be encouraged to include a story on how they used their strengths to overcome a previous challenge (Niemiec, 2018). A sample positive introduction can be provided to students in advance, before the commencement of online, synchronous sessions.
It may be helpful for facilitators to model positive introductions before students do the same. The facilitators can also gently suggest keeping to a mutually-agreed time limit (say, 2-3 minutes per student) so that everyone has sufficient time to share their positive introductions. Students will take turns presenting their positive introductions. The facilitator reaffirms and highlights noteworthy expressions of strengths from each student – they can engage in ‘strengths-spotting’ after each student’s sharing as a way to model recognition of one’s, and other’s strengths.

**Optional Reflection and Discussion Questions:**
If time permits, mentors can ask students to illustrate how they incorporate their strengths in their work and life to complement the activity.

**Further Reading:**

**Tips and Tricks:**
- To model strengths-spotting effectively, it is highly recommended that facilitators share their positive introductions first. This can be effective in lowering perceived status differences between the course facilitator and the students. Ultimately, this helps create a climate of psychological safety – expressed through facilitators’ positive introductions.
- If the group size is too large for all students to do the positive introductions, consider creating breakout rooms of no more than 15-20 students per room, with a facilitator in each room to guide this activity.
- Some self-disclosure is needed for this activity, as students may share personal stories that touch on sensitive and difficult experiences. These may include but are not limited to, overcoming adversity and challenges, confronting setbacks, or even experiencing loss. If students share these in for this activity, it is imperative that facilitators acknowledge how challenging it can be to share such experiences, taking care to emphasize the positives without discounting the negatives from the sharing.

**Activity 1b: High-Quality Connections Virtual Theatre Workshop**
This activity builds on the positive introductions activity. Once students have shared their positive introductions, they can then be introduced to specific skills that help build HQCs online. One such way is via respectful engagement, which is a powerful and effective way to build HQCs (Dutton, 2003). This activity helps students cultivate skills to create respectful engagement specifically for online interactions.

**Objective:** To enhance students’ ability to identify and practice the five features of high-quality connections.
**Time Requirements:** 1 hour

**Items:** N/A

**Key Learning Outcome:** Skills to cultivate respectful engagement in online interactions.

**Self-Disclosure:** ★★

**Activity Steps:**

1. At the start of this activity, students will be divided into pairs and assigned to a separate breakout room. Each pair will then be asked to brainstorm two questions: (i) What are the characteristics of a high-quality relationship? (ii) How do you know if you have a high-quality relationship with someone? The paired students will discuss their responses to these questions, using examples, for approximately 5 minutes.

2. Once students return to the main room, facilitators will ask them to share (via the text in the message box) some of what they think are qualities of high-quality relationships. Then, introduce the concept of high-quality connections (HQC), highlighting that these relationships are typified by (i) positive regard, (ii) trust, and (iii) active engagement with one another. Facilitators then compare how the students’ responses are identical/dissimilar to how HQCs are defined and discuss this further.

3. Facilitators then introduce the five ways of building respectful engagement and fostering HQCs, along with ways to portray them in online settings. The following can be presented to the students and introduced incrementally over the next 10 minutes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Conveying Presence</strong></th>
<th><strong>Being Genuine</strong></th>
<th><strong>Communicating Affirmation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Effective Listening</strong></th>
<th><strong>Supportive Communication</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being attentive and focusing on the individual by removing all distractions in one’s online and physical environment.</td>
<td>Speak with a genuine interest in getting to know and understand the other person.</td>
<td>Look for a ‘divine spark’ in the other – pick out something notably positive and outstanding in the other person.</td>
<td>Listen with the intention of understanding, instead of the intention of responding.</td>
<td>Use language that supports further self-disclosure and minimizes defensiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing down programs and apps that distract from online interactions.</td>
<td>Ask questions, cultivating curiosity for the other person’s uniqueness. Ask for ‘their story’ – (E.g., Why did you join this MOOC?)</td>
<td>Identify and ask the other person to share a previous success story or achievement they are proud of.</td>
<td>Listen attentively for feelings. Paraphrase, summarize, and reflect to reflect your understanding of the other person.</td>
<td>Use prompts that seek clarification and encourage further sharing (e.g., That’s interesting – tell me more) and avoid statements that imply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Facilitators can role model respectful engagement with a volunteering student. This helps students observe the features of respectful engagement and understand how they might respectfully interact with others in online settings.

5. The students are then organized into breakout rooms again, this time in groups of 4. For each breakout room, facilitators will create a theatre-like atmosphere. This can also be done by altering the virtual room’s background to mimic an actual theatre. 4 students are then assigned to separate roles – 2 will assume the role of actors and role-play respectful engagement and demonstrate HQCs, 1 ‘director’ to oversee the process and keep time, and 1 ‘reviewer’ to take note of and observe the quality of the interaction and offer constructive feedback on the actors’ interactions. Allow students to swap roles if time permits.

6. Once students return to the main room, facilitators then ask them to share their experiences in their groups. Highlight themes and identify their key takeaways and challenges faced from their interactions. It also helps to provide support and encouragement to students and suggest ways for them to continually practice respectful engagement while interacting with others online.

**Optional Reflection and Discussion Questions:**
- Did you observe features of respectful engagement during the HQC virtual theatre?
- What is one thing you will do differently when interacting with others online having learned about respectful engagement?
- What might be some challenges to respectful engagement in online settings?

**Further Readings:**
Dutton, J.E. (2017). Let’s bet on high quality connecting as a path for fostering well-being at work. In M. White, G. Slemp, & A. Murray (Eds.). *Future Directions in Well-Being* (pp. 111-115). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56889-8_20](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56889-8_20)

**Tips and Tricks:**
- Encourage students to learn and address their interaction partners by name. This helps create a more personal bond between individuals in the activity and online interactions in general.
- Select topics that students have a mutual, shared experience in. Centering the interactions on their impressions of the MOOC can help anchor the conversation to a shared experience and keep the online interactions relatable to everyone.
Part 2: Creating a Sense of Mattering and a “We Culture”

Mattering is not about if you fit in or not, it is about being valued.
- Peter Felten

Overview
Prilleltensky (2020) defines mattering as individuals’ need to feel valued and to add value to themselves, their relationships, their work, and their community. Mattering has been shown to increase individuals’ sense of community, belongingness, engagement, and positive emotions (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Within the context of online learning, this would mean that students feel valued, respected, recognized, and appreciated by the GMOOC learning community. By adding value, students make contributions to themselves, their cohorts, and the community.

Activity 2a: Building "We Culture" Norms Online
This activity aims to introduce and then encourage students to establish a “We Culture” online in their cohort or smaller work groups. The activity also introduces students to the differences between a “Me Culture” from a “We Culture.” Because no two groups will be completely identical to one another, students will also be asked to form their own unique cohort-specific cultures, while still ensuring that their groups follow the principles of a “We” rather than a “Me” culture. Feeling, and conveying value toward group members’ contributions has been shown to lead to increased motivation and enjoyment within the context of computer-assisted team-based learning (Gomez et al., 2010).

| Objective: | To establish “We Culture” norms for the GMOOC online community, namely (i) other people matter, (ii) non-judgment, (iii) respect, (iv) reciprocity, (v) responsibility, and (vi) encouragement. |
| Time Requirements: | 30-45 minutes |
| Items: | Writing instruments – pen, pencil; paper, notebook |
| Key Learning Outcome: | Skills to cultivate “We Culture” norms in online interactions |
| Self-Disclosure: | ✳ |

Activity Steps

1. Before conducting this activity, it helps to have the facilitators commit to modeling "We Culture" norms to students throughout the entire learning experience. This ensures that every student continually feels psychologically safe throughout their entire learning online. Facilitators can be gently reminded to act as inclusive hosts, with the ultimate goal of facilitating the online learning community’s wellness and fairness.

2. At the start of this activity, facilitators will spend 10 minutes introducing the concept of the “We Culture”, and the norms associated with such a culture. This includes (i) other people matter, (ii) non-judgment, (iii) respect, (iv) reciprocity, (v) responsibility, and (vi) encouragement. Facilitators can also emphasize the differences between a “We Culture” and “Me Culture” before
inviting students to share their perspectives about the characteristics of a “We Culture”. For example, in the “Me Culture,” people will say: “I have the right to feel valued by others so that I may experience wellness.” While in the “We Culture”, people will say: “We all have the right and responsibility to feel valued and add value, to ourselves and others, so that we may all experience wellness and fairness.”

**Characteristics of “We” vs “Me” Cultures (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We Culture</th>
<th>Me Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We all have the right and responsibility to feel valued and add value, so that we may all experience happiness and fairness.</td>
<td>I have the right to feel valued so that I may be happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People matter</td>
<td>I matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-judgment</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Personal judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>Self-reliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Lack of empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. After the introduction of the differences between the “We” and “Me” cultures, assign students to small breakout rooms with their cohorts. They will discuss and generate their cohorts’ “We Culture” norms that they will practice during the whole online learning interaction. Students will then be asked to write down their “We Culture” norms on paper so that these can be shared with the larger group once the breakout sessions conclude.

4. When students return to the main group with all other students, facilitators will encourage them to share their cohorts’ “We Culture” norms. Facilitators will take note of, and highlight “We Culture” norms that are noteworthy or unique to the student cohorts that generated them.

**Optional Reflection and Discussion Questions:**
- Did you feel valued during the discussions and online community interactions? What are your feelings when you feel valued?
- What is one thing you will do differently when interacting with others online having learned about “We Culture”?
- How do you think the “We Culture” affects our well-being?
- How would you use what you have learned about “We Culture” in the future? In what other situations (interactions with family, in-person class, workplace, broader community) will you use what you have learned today to foster a strong “We Culture”?

**Further Readings:**
Catyanadika, P.E. and Rajasekera, J. (2022), Influence of psychological safety and social presence on knowledge sharing behavior in higher education online learning


**Tips and Tricks:**
- Facilitators will act as a model of "We Culture" throughout the entire learning experience. It is important that facilitators role-model and uphold the norms shared in this activity throughout all live, synchronous interactions with students.
- It can be helpful to stress that “fairness is as important as wellness” and that, “there can be no wellness without fairness.” This is a key characteristic of what it means to matter.
- Encourage students to convey respect and interest to their peers during their online interactions. Since this activity is likely to take place after students are introduced to HQCs, gently remind them to model ways of building and sustaining HQCs using respectful engagement in their sharing and discussions with fellow students.

**Activity 2b: Generating a Team Vision**

For this activity, students will work with their cohort groups to generate a compelling team vision and then use that vision to generate specific goals they wish to achieve as a cohort. The goals generated can help guide and channel team efforts toward general outcomes and are based on sound empirical research showing how goals direct attention and effort, motivate and energize, and enhance persistence (*Locke & Latham, 2002*). Sharing a common goal – and importantly, highlighting intrinsically-motivating goals can bolster students' commitment and perseverance toward their learning goals in online learning settings (*Chen & Jang, 2010*).

| **Objective:** To help students create a compelling team vision. This includes (i) establishing a clear vision of the work that they will do together and (ii) forming goals they want to achieve as a cohort. |
| **Time Requirements:** 30 minutes |
| **Items:** Writing instruments – pen, pencil; paper, notebook |
| **Key Learning Outcome:** Skills to generate a team vision and shared goals to facilitate the attainment of online learning outcomes. |
| **Self-Disclosure:** ** ** |

**Activity Steps:**
1. Students will first be assigned to separate breakout rooms as cohorts. Facilitators will help students explore their "dream" of applying their learning outcomes for real-world benefit. The process of "dreaming" includes stimulating conversations about passionate thinking and the creation of positive images and is part of vision ideation. Both the vision and the dream are, in essence, expressions of a positive, aspirational goal that students hold upon enrolling in their MOOC or online course.

2. Facilitators will ask students the following questions to help them form compelling and clear team visions:
   i. Why did you decide to attend this MOOC/online course?
   ii. What goals do you wish to achieve during the learning experiences?
   iii. How do you think your learning experiences from this area (e.g., psychology/business/economics) and new ideas can impact the world?
   iv. How would you like to apply your learning in the real world?
   v. How does your application help make the world a better place?

3. Students will be asked to write clear, compelling visions for their teams. These team visions will guide their collaborative efforts during the online learning process and help them hold in mind how they can apply positive psychology to their communities after completing their online course.

4. When students go back to the main group, each cohort will then be encouraged to present their cohort’ “team vision” in the main group. Facilitators highlight the compelling visions shared by each team and pay particular attention to the strengths and uniqueness of each team’s vision statement and learning goals.

Optional Reflection and Discussion Questions:
   - What are the personal factors that encouraged you to enroll in this program? What attracted you to, and then encouraged you to sign up for this online course?
   - How is the topic you are studying relevant to your life, work, and study?
   - What might be some challenges when you apply your learning to the real world? How might you overcome these challenges?

Further Readings:


**Tips and Tricks:**
- Guide students to explore their intrinsic motivations and inform them that their interest, enjoyment, and inherent satisfaction are possible reasons they may have chosen to enroll in the current online course. Students may have signed on to the course based on intrinsic motivation, so it is useful to explore these key motivators for their enrolment and expectations from the course.
- Help students figure out how the impact of their applications for the real world. This helps encourage them to think about their learning and growth as a continual, gradual process that extends beyond their online course.

**Part 3: Cultivating Mutual Value**

*To get the full value of joy, you must have someone to divide it with.*

- *Mark Twain*

**Overview**

Mutual value theory prescribes that positive relationships and communities are built when three types of values are created between or among the participants: (i) self-value, (ii) perceived self-value, and (iii) other-value (Boyanton, 2011; 2014). Cultivating a sense of mutual value is crucial in online interactions. Feeling valued as being part of a team has been shown to encourage a willingness to invest in one’s team efforts (Ellemers et al., 2013) and is an essential ingredient of facilitating learning discussions in online settings (Rovai, 2007).

**Activity 3a: I Have a Dream Speech**

This activity is called “I Have a Dream,” inspired by Martin Luther King’s speech of the same name. The purpose of this activity is to help the team brainstorm ideas for their Challenge Project. In this activity, students will be encouraged to have a dream – to brainstorm, discuss, and generate ideas that will help them, as a result of their learning experience, make this world a better place. The idea for this activity is loosely connected to the ‘dream’ stage of the Appreciative Inquiry 4D model (Cooperider et al., 2008).

**Objective:** To help students brainstorm ideas and topics for their challenge projects.

**Time Requirements:** 2-3 minutes for each student, total activity time depends on the number of students enrolled.

**Items:** A video of the “I Have a Dream” speech by Martin Luther King (A high-quality recording is available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4iYTtS3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4iYTtS3s))
**Key Learning Outcome:** The ability to generate and subsequently, articulate a sense of purpose, mission, and meaning for one’s life. Students will also develop skills that help them acknowledge others’ values and foster connections with each other through shared values.

**Self-Disclosure: ⭐⭐⭐⭐

**Activity Steps:**
This activity works best for MOOCs and online courses where there is a team challenge project/group learning assignment. In such courses, students will be asked to address a social challenge or social problem.

1. **Before the synchronous session or the commencement of the course,** students write down a vision of their ideal world, contrasting that positive vision with the challenges and problems faced by society today. They will also be encouraged to watch Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech as a guide to helping them generate their vision for positive change.

2. **During the synchronous sessions,** facilitators then ask each student to take turns sharing their dreams and vision for the future. Students will be asked to imagine the kind of world that they would like to see in an ideal world – the world they would like to live in. They will also be encouraged to share their observations of current challenges, difficulties, and problems in our society today.

3. **Facilitators will then guide students** to think of the broader aims of their participation in the online course, and also help them express their values and how they can contribute meaningfully to their communities and the world at large. This can be facilitated in the presence of all other students, but if more personal sharing is desired, facilitators can set up and oversee the sharing over smaller, breakout rooms.

4. **Activity variant:** With students’ permission, administrators for the online course can ask students to share photos, signature strengths, and background information. They can then compile all the collected information together into a digital file. This file will be shared with the students ahead of time, allowing them to read and acknowledge each other’s dreams and challenges before engaging with each other in the online learning experience. This option can be used to run the activity asynchronously.

**Optional Reflection and Discussion Questions:**
If time permits, facilitators can ask students to share the personal challenges and problems that they experience or observe in their own personal/family/work life en route to their hopes, dreams, and enrolment in the online course. The questions may vary, but facilitators should acknowledge and respect the unique challenges and difficulties some students may face (financial, physical limitations, parental objections) from their enrolment in the online course.

**Further Readings:**


### Tips and Tricks:

- To inspire students’ thinking and awaken their higher sense of purpose for their learning, it may be helpful to play Martin Luther King’s speech at the very beginning. The suggested recording provided above is just under 7 minutes and should fit into the plan of most synchronous sessions with students.

- To create a strong connection between students, facilitators can also consider grouping or assigning student groups based on similar dreams and goals. Some themes may include social justice, environmental conservation, equality via education, or addressing mental health concerns.

**Activity 3b: Blind Date**

This activity can be conducted on the first day of the program’s orientation and follows after the “I Have a Dream” activity. Self-disclosure of one’s personal qualities is an effective way to enhance the trust and acceptance of individuals and may be especially effective when the disclosure revolves around sensitive topics (Dutton et al., 2019).

| Objective: | To help students form connections and bonding quickly right after they meet each other for the first time. |
| Time Requirements: | 15-30 minutes |
| Items: | Blind date interview questions (See Optional Reflection and Discussion section below) |
| Key Learning Outcome: | Skills that help students increase (i) their other-value for each other by spotting good qualities in others, and (ii) their perceived self-value by receiving good value judgments from the other. |

**Self-Disclosure:** ★★★

**Activity Steps:**

1. Similar to the “I Have a Dream” activity, students can be paired up based on similar dreams, goals, and challenges. This can be done before the start of the synchronous session to reduce the amount of time required to complete this entire activity.

2. At the start of the synchronous session, facilitators will assign each pair to a breakout room and have them interact with each other as if they were on a blind date. As an added twist to
this activity, it might even be effective to require that the interacting pairs converse with one another with their webcams switched off – this simulates an actual ‘blind date’ in a creative manner.

3. Students will take turns interviewing each other and asking the following questions. Questions (iii) and (iv) might be especially helpful if asked after students have participated in the ‘I Have a Dream’ activity:

   i. If you didn’t have to work or study right now, and money is not an issue, where would you be and what would you be doing? With whom and why?
   ii. What are some of your core values, qualities, interests, and passions? What about your character/signature strengths?
   iii. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you like to know?
   iv. Is there something you’ve dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven’t you done it?

4. The activity can also encourage students to share positive characteristics they observe in their interaction partners. One of the prompts that a facilitator might use could thus be, “I would now like you to each take turns to list at least three positive qualities and attributes you’ve observed in each other from your conversation so far.” Facilitators might join in a breakout room 10 minutes after the blind date has started to pose this additional question to the students.

5. After the paired conversation, facilitators return students to the main meeting room for a debrief, inviting students to share their experiences from their blind dates.

Optional Reflection and Discussion Questions:
- A useful list of questions that can be used to facilitate self-disclosure and mutual value and appreciation between interacting partners can be found at https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/09/style/no-37-big-wedding-or-small.html
- How did the interactions with your blind date make you feel? Was there anything from this experience that surprised you?

Further Reading:


Tips and Tricks:
Encourage students to learn and address their interaction partners by name. This helps create a more personal bond between individuals in the activity and online interactions in general.

Select topics that students have a mutual, shared experience in. Centering the interactions on their impressions of the MOOC can help anchor the conversation to a shared experience and keep the online interactions relatable to everyone.

Measuring the Effectiveness of the Activities: The Connection and Relationship Self-assessment Scale

Administrators and/or facilitators of the MOOC program or online learning course may wish to assess the effectiveness of the six suggested activities for building HQCs, cultivating mattering, and fostering mutual value in online learning environments. The following measurement instrument can thus be used to assess the quality of connections and relationships experienced by students engaged in online learning.

The measure should be administered twice – once at the start of their online learning, and once more after students complete the online course. The items can be scored on 1-5 point Likert scales (where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree) and is a composite of two psychometrically-valid and reliable measures (Albelbisi, 2020; Carmeli et al., 2009). These measures are reliable at $\alpha \geq .72$. The 10-item measure is presented here:

1. I know most of my [MOOC/online course] peers very well.
2. I have had many opportunities to interact with my [MOOC/online course] peers.
3. I feel very comfortable when being in this online learning environment.
4. I feel a strong sense of connection with my [MOOC/online course] peers.
5. I feel self is being valued and appreciated by each other in this [MOOC/online course].
6. I feel a strong sense of community of care and love in this [MOOC/online course].
7. I have experienced many positive emotions and had a positive experience with this [MOOC/online course].
8. I have been very actively engaged when participating in this [MOOC/online course].
9. I feel that I have learned a lot from this [MOOC/online course]; it is high-quality learning.
10. Overall, I am very satisfied with this [MOOC/online course].
Handbook Appendix A: About the Authors and Sample Positive Introductions

Dengting Boyanton
Dengting Boyanton (Applied Positive Psychology) is a proud MAPPster majoring in the applied positive psychology program. Dengting received her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Virginia (UVa). Her research interests lie in psychological well-being, mental health, teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships, engagement, motivation, character development, and youth empowerment. Dengting has been actively involved in research, writing academic articles, attending conferences, and publishing. She has published numerous articles and presented at numerous conferences. She has been invited to give talks to various schools, organizations, and companies. Most recently, she presented her work at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Conference and the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPW) World Congress.

Dengting’s book Towards a Mutual Value Theory: Teachers and Students as Co-Learners was published by Peter Lang Publishing in 2014 and is now for sale in over twenty countries. As the founder of mutual value theory, she has given over 200 national and international presentations and workshops on this theory. Her work was featured in such publications as China Daily, China News, Xinhua News, and Yangtze Evening. She was also invited by Central China Television (CCTV) to register for a positive psychology account on their official online platform. Before joining MAPP, Dengting worked as an Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas (Brownsville) and Long Island University-Post (LIU-Post), where she served as the Director of the Childhood Education Program and the Co-Director of the TEDxLIU Conference. She also served as the doctoral dissertation committee chair or member of ten doctoral dissertation committees.

Jamie Chung
Jamie has an illustrious and successful career working in human resources/corporate wellness for the past 18 years and was most recently Senior Vice President of Rewards & People Services at Sony Pictures Entertainment. Before joining Sony, Jamie was Vice President at Goldman Sachs, where she established and led the firm’s employee wellness program for the Asia Pacific region. Jamie started her career as a strategic and operational consultant for various telecommunications and manufacturing companies in the U.S., Hong Kong, Japan, and the UK. Later, she returned to Hong Kong to pursue start-up opportunities, establishing an event management business, and developing a luxury health club company. She was also a certified Pilates instructor conducting private and group classes in Hong Kong and Japan. After moving around the US, Asia, and Europe, Jamie has spent the last 15 years in Los Angeles, California with her husband Dan, and two daughters.
Eugene (Yu Jin) Tee
Eugene Tee is presently an Associate Professor in Psychology at the Department of Psychology, HELP University, Malaysia. He teaches and conducts research in the field of emotions and positive psychology. His research work has been featured in academic books and journals, including The Leadership Quarterly, The Asian Journal of Social Psychology, and The International Journal of Wellbeing. Eugene has delivered presentations, both locally as part of his science communication outreach initiative, and internationally in scientific conferences. He is a TEDx speaker, features regularly on BFM Radio, and has also appeared in print media such as The Edge and Malaysia Tatler. Eugene has also conducted emotions management training sessions for both organizations such as JP Morgan and The New Zealand High Commission, He is a member of The International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA). His latest book, The Science of Feelings, was awarded by the National Book Council of Malaysia as one of the 50 Best Malaysian Titles for International Rights 2021/2022.

XIE Lixian (Sherry)
Sherry is presently a Master of Applied Positive Psychology student at the University of Pennsylvania and a Certified Positive Psychology Instructor from Tsinghua University. Sherry is a serial entrepreneur. She has founded two companies from scratch during the past eight years. Her first company, iMD Consulting, is in the field of human resources. She cooperates with Fortune 500 companies (Apple, Philips, etc.) and local Chinese companies (Alibaba, Tencent, etc.), and helps them develop talent strategies and grow their business. Her second company, MindIn, led to the development of the MindIn (慢慢冥想) Mini Program, based on the WeChat platform, and has also resulted in the creation of various psychology-related IPs: 慢慢爱冥想 (Bilibili, Red, and Zhihu), as well as the creation of Mindful Tea. She has also led stress reduction and mindfulness workshops in organizations. Sherry was invited to talk on the topic of mindfulness in the workplace at the 4th Chinese Mindfulness Meditation Academic Conference. She was a volunteer in the COVID-19 Psychological Aid program and helped Chinese people enhance their psychological health during the most difficult times of the pandemic. Besides, Sherry is a certificated Yoga and Meditation Instructor, and Happiness Trainer. She has also trained in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) at The Oxford Mindfulness Center, the Mindfulness-Based Strengths Certification Program at the VIA Institute on Character.

Handbook Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

o **Appreciative Inquiry:** The cooperative and co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them (Cooperider et al., 2008).

o **Character Strengths:** Personality traits that reflect our basic identity, produce positive outcomes for ourselves and others, and contribute to the collective good (Niemiec, 2018).
- **cMOOC**: Connective Massive Open Online Courses. A MOOC model based on a connectivist paradigm, wherein the transfer of knowledge occurs when learners engage with and participate in the shared, collective community of learning (*Anderson & Dron, 2011*).

- **Goal-setting**: The act of identifying an object or aim to direct one’s actions. Goals are a cognitive concept that is comparable to terms such as ‘intent’ and ‘purpose’ (*Locke et al., 1981*).

- **High-quality connections (HQC)s**: Dyadic, one-on-one whereby interacting parties hold positive mutual regard for one another, trust one another and continue to actively engage with each other (*Dutton, 2003*).

- **Mattering**: An individual’s need to feel valued and to add value to themselves, their relationships, their work, and their community (*Prilleltensky, 2020*).

- **Mutual Value/Mutual Value Theory**: Mutual value theory prescribes that mutual value – a positive relationship and community is built when three types of values are created between or among the participants: (i) self-value, (ii) perceived self-value, and (iii) other-value (*Boyanton, 2011; 2014*).

- **Psychological Safety**: People’s perceptions of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in a particular context (*Edmondson & Lei, 2014*).

- **Respectful Engagement**: Interacting with others in ways that express appreciation of others’ worth, positive regard, and that others matter (*Dutton, 2003*).

- **Signature Strengths**: An individual’s highest character strengths – the strengths that most define an individual and those that the individual can use most ‘naturally’ (*Niemiec, 2019*).

- **xMOOC**: Extended Massive Open Online Courses. A MOOC model based on a behaviorist-cognitive paradigm, which emphasizes knowledge transfer. In xMOOCs, instructors prepare pre-recorded teaching materials and learners learn from these materials at their own pace (*Moe, 2015*).