Adapting for Learners’ Cultural Diversity in Open Courses: MOOC Instructors’ Efforts at Personalized Learning Environments

Abstract
This mixed methods study investigates the tools and techniques massive open online courses (MOOCs) instructors used to reshape the learning environment for cultural diversity and learner personalization. Leveraging a grounded theory approach the researchers analyzed 19 email interviews from MOOC and distance education leaders supplemented by 28 archival, participant-written case descriptions. Leading to the analysis and formation of an online questionnaire, which was completed by 134 MOOC instructors. While most of instructors did not understand complex issues of cultural diversity, most made attempts to modify their instructional practices to accommodate cultural variances. A majority of the instructors favored collaborative, small group learning; however the instructors could not agree on best practices to establish these groups.

Method
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Findings
MOOC Instructors Interpretations of Cultural Diversity
• "We used Google Translate" “Discuss cultural differences”
  • “Encouraged participants to develop/share content about their own experiences”
  • “…It’s a primary concern throughout”
  • “A Facebook group started to translate materials”
  • “[showed] videos”
  • “Transcrips and closed captioning provided”
  • “Include content from other cultures and places”
  • “Consider…design of assignments and encourage sharing of diverse examples from different countries on discussion form”

Cultural Diversity & Linguistic Diversity
Nearly all MOOC instructors in our sample liked the idea of addressing culture
• Many claimed to do it
• When asked what steps they took - they were not able to describe “how” they addressed culture (often centering on issues of language competencies)

Further research is needed to determine where diversity is reflected upon?
• Before the MOOC is taught
• Just in time teaching strategies
• Post MOOC reflection

A need to investigate the relationship between a participant’s country of origin and language...and culture?