Cultural Sensitivity Issues Related to MOOCs
Part 1: Recommendations and Suggestions
Per "*MOOCs and Open Education Around the World*" Book Chapter Contributors
Curt Bonk, Indiana University, Mimi Lee, University of Houston, and Tom Reeves, The University of Georgia
AECT Conference, Indianapolis, Media SIG Presidential Session
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Part 1: Recommendations and Suggestions:

1. Chapter 2 (USA/Georgia Tech): Karen Head
   a. Be careful with small things like finger pointing—use at least two fingers.
   b. Jokes and humor can easily be misinterpreted.
   c. Be aware of shifting political climates impacting resource access such as YouTube in China.
   d. Many cultures do not have a linear approach (e.g., from A to B) to communication.
   e. Using visual rhetoric (e.g., visual images) to communicate can be a minefield of problems.
2. Chapter 3 (Japan/The Open U): Kumiko Aiko
   a. Make subtitles available in multiple languages based on intended audiences.
   b. Avoid references to current events that may only be shared by a small subgroup.
3. Chapter 5 (Australia/Tasmania): Carina Bossu
   a. To ensure inclusiveness (including cultural, ethical, and religious), one should openly license all educational materials developed for MOOCs, so as to guarantee the permissions and freedoms required for translation, adaptation, re-use, redistribution, and repackaging.
4. Chapter 6 (University of Cape Town, South Africa): Laura Czerniewicz
   a. The single most important requirement is that MOOCs and MOOC resources be made available under Creative Commons licenses or other open licenses which allow for re-use and adaptation. No matter how culturally sensitive the materials, it is essential that a broadcast model not be employed.
   b. The agency for and ownership of local resources need to be in the hands of those who best understand local conditions, and therefore they need to be able to create and adapt as they see fit.
5. Chapter 8 (New Zealand and Ireland): Mark Brown
   a. Create MOOCs on indigenous cultures and unique languages other than English (e.g., Irish).
6. Chapter 9 (Scotland/U if Edinburgh): Amy Woodgate
   a. Intermittent Internet access on one's mobile phone will not help to stream HD videos.
   b. Simple course designs (e.g., talking heads with minimal hand gestures) helps to make content more available for international audiences. More engaging content is more difficult to convert.
7. Chapter 11 (India and Canada/the Commonwealth of Learning): Sanjaya Mishra
   a. Be culturally sensitive to music and pictures while designing content for global audience.
   b. Consider technology used to develop the content (does it assist reuse and remixing?).
   c. Consider capabilities of teachers to revise and remix the content; teacher capacity development.
   d. Instead of focusing too much on the cultural sensitivity of MOOCs and raising costs, try to allow for reuse and remixing of content. Use open source technologies and content.
8. Chapter 12 (the Netherlands/The Open U): Darco Jansen
   a. Take into account the digital literacy skills of participants.
   b. Consider various accessibility issues (including language barriers).
   c. Consider cultural barriers (e.g., dominance of case examples from the West)
   d. Be aware of legal differences and barriers (copyright vs. copyleft vs public)
9. Chapter 14 (USA/Stanford): Paul Kim and Charlie Chung
   a. Encourage students to download lecture videos and translate them to other languages and perhaps add captions and make available in their local cloud services.
   b. Encourage students to create low bandwidth versions of videos for those in low bandwidth areas.
   c. Encourage students to translate videos and add nuances and words understandable in local languages.
   d. Encourage students to meet locally in teams to share materials and take care of "sensitive matters."
   e. Caption videos in same language as the audio for proficient speakers (and helps the hard of hearing).
   f. Have suggested instructions/directions for those who tend to respect authority and following directions
   g. Have communication options for discussion boards (Whats App, WeChat, KaoKao Talk, etc.).
10. Chapter 15 (USA/ University of Michigan): Chuck Severance
   a. Avoid troublesome metaphors and examples (e.g., the baseball World Series in the USA).
   b. Never show lecturer's face (use audio only)—allows for complete overdubbing in the native language and avoid hand gesture problems.
   c. Make slides as word free as possible—where possible use symbols.

    d. Put as much content as possible in text form and less in video lecture form.

    e. Use GitHub or other OER repository to place access to course content online for free.

11. Chapter 18 (Canada/Commonwealth of Learning): Balaji Venkataraman

    a. Keep any video presentation simple.

    b. Utilize course content development teams from more than one country or culture.

    c. Train MOOC instructors and designers in cultural sensitivity.

12. Chapter 19 (DC/World Bank Institute): Sheila Jagannathan

    a. We are careful about Gender inclusion: Ensuring that visual have global people and dress represented not just western men and women in suits.

    b. Ensuring that characters represent a wide stakeholder group of public, private, grass roots, etc.

13. Chapter 20 (Indonesia and Malaysia): Zoraini Wati Abas

    a. Do not expect Asian audience to quickly voice their opinions

    b. Treat Asian audience as an equal, spoken to politely, softly, and with great respect.

    c. Avoid issues related to religion and politics.

    d. Minimize distractions and negative feelings (e.g., do not show visuals or give examples of prohibited types of foods or animals)

14. Chapter 21 (the Philippines/The Open U): Melinda Bandalaria

    a. Strictly avoid references to religion.

    b. Use acceptable dress code.

    c. Even when English is the primary or secondary language of the country, consider making MOOC content available in the major dialects of the country.

    d. Create and comply with video production guidelines such as that related to filming children.

    e. Be sensitive to other concerns such as gender, age, inclusion of senior citizens, & physical disabilities.

15. Chapter 22 (African Virtual University): Griff Richards

    a. Be aware of the cultural aspects being acknowledged when materials are translated. Each linguistic group has its own scientific history and culture.

16. Chapter 24 (Ireland/ALISON): Mike Feerick

    a. Find ways to neutralize the content in terms of culturally sensitive issues.

    b. Arabic audiences read content right to left, not left to right.

    c. Remove references to alcohol consumption from courses with predominately Muslim audiences.

17. Chapter 25 (USA/The U of Illinois at Springfield): Ray Schroeder and Vickie Cook

    a. Focus should be on sensitivity in corporate MOOCs since higher education already has vast experience in teaching international students.

18. Chapter 27 (Canada): Helene Fournier and Rita Hop

    a. Due to their massiveness, it is vital to personalize the learning experience.

    b. Need to think hard about how cultural differences might be expressed and accepted in the MOOC platform.

19. Chapter 28 (UK/Future Learn/The UK Open U): Rebecca Ferguson and Mike Sharples

    a. FutureLearn works with many overseas partners and many issues of cultural sensitivity have emerged. Among them are the following:

    b. Access. In many countries (e.g., in Africa, but also areas of Asia) mobile is the main means of access, so the courses need to be developed for a mobile-first experience, including pedagogy as well as interface.

    c. Provide transcripts of videos, preferably in multiple languages and multi-language subtitles.

    d. The FutureLearn pedagogy of 'social learning' needs to be explained, not just demonstrated. There's a trade-off between inducting people into the social learning process (with the danger that some people will drop out of the course) and throwing them into it. We have tried to address this by making the social elements optional (at least at the start) but visible, to encourage vicarious learning.

    e. There are deep-seated cultural differences related to: the value of expert vs learner-originated knowledge; deference to experts; willingness to engage in discussion and critique - with the most noticeable contrasts between those educated in Anglo-Saxon education systems and in Confucian ones.

20. Chapter 29 (USA): Reynolds, Reeves, Lee, and Bonk

    a. Be cognizant that images of certain hand gestures or body movements may offend people or not be part of societal norms.

    b. Other potentially offensive content are case situations or scenarios involving alcohol, the incorporation of pictures of dogs in the Middle East, political humor/satire, and the use of quotes from religious leaders.

    c. Be careful when incorporating videos such as those in YouTube which are not accessible in cultures like China and other countries for political and technological reasons.

    d. Choice of clothing, hair style, music, jokes, etc., can all be problematic.

    e. Dominance of English language in audio files embedded with videos, pictures, animations, simulations, etc., is a pervasive concern.

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Part 2: Additional Comments and Remarks
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Part 2: Additional Comments and Remarks
1. Chapter 2 (USA/Georgia Tech): Karen Head
   a. Let's begin with a global admonition: instructors of MOOCs must give more attention to issues of culture when planning their courses. Too often little disregard in MOOCs for those who are not Americans.
   b. My chapter in the MOOCs book explains why people should consider cultural issues. It also highlights and demonstrates how difficult it can actually be to negotiate a wide cultural terrain.
   c. Offering something for free does not excuse course designers and instructors from being culturally sensitive. Free and open does not excuse cultural illiteracy. Instructors need to become culturally literate.
   d. Unlike computer science and math, the selection of certain English literature privileges certain works over others. In the humanities, there is a danger of forcing a Western canon of thought onto another culture.
   e. Due to limited resources, prelaunch video cautioned that English fluency essential for course success.
   f. While we did not expect it, one group of Russian students translated all of the MOOC content to Russian.
2. Chapter 3 (Japan/The Open U): Kumiko Aiko
   a. No additional comments.
3. Chapter 5 (Australia/Tasmania): Carina Bossu
   a. There is a need for frameworks for institutions to use to assess their institutional readiness for the development and implementation of open education. We have developed a short course to help educ developers, instructional designers, and academics to integrate elements of open education practices.
4. Chapter 6 (University of Cape Town, South Africa): Laura Czerniewicz
   a. See her argument in The Conversation: "It's time to redraw the world's very unequal knowledge map."
5. Chapter 8 (New Zealand and Ireland): Mark Brown
   a. One of MOOCs we developed at Open2Study in New Zealand was on indigenous populations. Now we are doing one in Ireland on the Irish language.
6. Chapter 9 (Scotland/U of Edinburgh): Amy Woodgate
   a. Content produced in partnership with another institution/organization can foster a different cultural lens and the design of MOOCs to be more culturally sensitive (e.g., "Code Yourself" from Edinburgh-Uruguay collaboration and mental health podcast based media programs).
   b. The U of Edinburgh has an Intro to Philosophy course with subtitles in over 10 languages; not designed to be mindful of other cultures but simple design helps international audiences.
7. Chapter 11 (India and Canada): Sanjaya Mishra
   a. Use culturally sensitive guidelines for music/pictures when designing content for global audiences (e.g., see guidelines Paul Kawachi: http://www.cemca.org.in/ckfinder/userfiles/files/TIPS-Shorter_12August2013.pdf)
   b. Creating and designing a course for large numbers of people is always challenges and cost intensive.
   c. Once localization of OER is done, cultural issues can be taken care of more easily.
   d. These are on-going concerns as learning technologies continue to change.
8. Chapter 12 (the Netherlands/The Open U): Darco Jansen
   a. Open educational practices (OEP) are related to the removal of all kinds of barriers in education.
   b. Need open access policies for public funded research.
   c. Need for open licensing policy for subsidized education output to benefit all in society.
9. Chapter 14 (USA/Stanford): Paul Kim and Charlie Chung
   a. Participants downloaded lecture videos and translated and uploaded to local cloud services (e.g., Chinese students added captions and uploaded to Chinese service (Yuku)--YouTube not accessible without VPN.
   b. Some students created low bandwidth versions of my videos for those who live in low bandwidth regions.
   c. Students translated videos to other languages (e.g., Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, etc.) & added local language specific nuances/words to make understandable to target groups; i.e., students voluntarily made adjustments.
   d. In addition, since many students physically met locally as teams, I am certain they were able to take care of various "sensitive matters" and shared them among themselves.
   e. I still do not understand what triggered them to do a lot of volunteer work for their global peers. I would say passion must have played an important role in our MOOC.
10. Chapter 15 (USA/University of Michigan): Chuck Severance
    a. Culture is less of an issue for technical courses where students don't see as much English.

b. Check out my TCP/IP course for high school students. Using a new approach to develop and share the course content that is 100% translatable—all using non-text images.

c. Cultural adaptation less an issue at large public universities like the U. of Michigan which are already super-diverse from a cultural perspective as compared to a community college environment where an instructor might have to pause and reflect on the course examples more (cultural adaption might be a new skills).

11. Chapter 18 (Canada/Commonwealth of Learning): Balaji Venkataraman

a. Our MOOCs policy brief notes that MOOCs need not be confined to higher ed settings. We need to see MOOCs at HE+ wherein we bring the power and advantages of HE pedagogy, evaluation, etc., to non-formal and on-the-job training as well as to MOOCs that can raise social awareness of difference issues.

12. Chapter 19 (DC/World Bank Institute): Sheila Jagannathan

a. MOOC are an ideal tool for broad awareness raising on complex development challenges like climate change, gender, good sanitation practices; MOOCs are now used to sensitize people on these issues.

b. Since we target global decision makers govt officials who are at senior level, we have not make a big deal of cultural differences as these are highly educated people often in western countries.

13. Chapter 20 (Indonesia and Malaysia): Zoraini Wati Abas

a. Asians (particularly Southeast Asians) are particularly tolerant and understand that what they see and hear are not catered to the Asian perspective.

b. Important to consider how MOOCs in SE Asia are designed to cater to local needs rather than int'l needs.

14. Chapter 21 (the Philippines/Open U): Melinda Bandalaria

a. We have positioned our MOOCs to cater to Filipinos wherever they are since we look at MOOCs as one tool to education and economic inclusion.

b. We need to look at academy-industry gaps in terms of skills and knowledge (especially for continuing education) and position our MOOCs to fill those gaps.

c. We may abandon the concept of "massiveness" in terms of enrollment and focus on open online courses. This stance is in line with our mission as a public service university.

d. MOOCs are also a way of facilitating the exchange of ideas and co-creation of knowledge which can thicken the dialogue and discussion about specific topics and can even lead to theory building.

15. Chapter 22 (African Virtual University): Griff Richards

a. Every piece of instruction includes a cultural bias that reflects the language, academic traditions, and technological culture of those who create and present online. It is important to acknowledge our biases.

16. Chapter 24 (Ireland/ALISON): Mike Feerick

a. There are economic constraints for social enterprises like ALISON to translate or record content in Chinese. We are aware of our shortcomings and plan to provide universally accessible content over time.

17. Chapter 25 (USA/University of Illinois at Springfield): Ray Schroeder and Vickie Cook

a. Seems to be a movement now to translate MOOCs to Spanish.

b. Nothing new here in HE except students are coming to MOOCs without being formally prepared for HE. We need to be sensitive to those who may lack traditional education course preparation.

c. Alternative models growing; e.g., Corps leveraging MOOCs to save money while allowing employees to access higher quality self-determined learning opportunities. Corps are becoming better at curating and using open learning assets; MOOCs increasingly important in training, retraining, and employee recruiting.

18. Chapter 27 (Canada): Helene Fournier and Rita Hop

a. Cultural sensitivity guidelines may just be wishful thinking; in fact, MOOCs may be new, but scholars have wrestled with questions about cultural barriers in education for years.

b. The design and development of MOOCs is still very technology driven; innovative learning approaches and pedagogy are too often an afterthought.

c. The discourse around cultural sensitivity & differences in MOOCs is clear—more work needs to be done.

d. The road ahead for MOOCs will hinge on personalizing learning experiences; the connectivist approach (i.e., cMOOCs) is which participants are in the driver's seat.

e. Look at projects like FutureLearn from the Open U in the UK and Naples Frederico II. Most impressive to see the concerted efforts to think hard about cultural differences and scalability.

19. Chapter 28 (UK/Future Learn/UK Open U): Rebecca Ferguson

a. There is a need for "re-versioning" courses for other cultures and languages (e.g., UK to USA).

b. Look at the work of Patrick McAndrew on a project called "Bridge to Success."

c. Some materials that appear open from a first-world perspective don't feel so open in other parts of the globe. See ALT-C talk from Laura Czerniewicz. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEglB5b_msk

d. See Learning at Massive Scale slides: http://www.slideshare.net/sharplem/social-learning-at-massive-scale-lwmoocs-2015-slideshare and http://oro.open.ac.uk/40787/

20. Chapter 29 (USA): Reynolds, Reeves, Lee, and Bonk

a. Cultural sensitivity in MOOCs is often overlooked.