Online Learning, ODL and MOOCs: A Global Perspective

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MOOCs, High Technology, & Higher Learning
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MOOCs, High Technology, and Higher Learning

- Analyzes the MOOC movement from a sociological perspective rooted in *educational equity concerns*.

- Analyzes *existing MOOC research* and MOOC–related articles (including media coverage).

- Also based on an empirical analysis of *pedagogical strategies* employed in 24 MOOC courses, purposely sampled from several global providers.

- Analyzes MOOCs as the outgrowth of the Open Courseware (OCW) and Open Educational Resource (OER) movements.

- Charts the *system of actors and organizations* that constitute the OCW/MOOC movement.
MOOCs, High Technology, and Higher Learning

- Highlights 3 kinds of MOOCs:
  - cMOOCs
  - xMOOCs
  - xsMOOCs
cMOOCs

“cMOOC” stands for “connectivist” MOOC.

Based on theories of connectivist learning and collective intelligence.

Connectivist learning relates to the idea that learning takes place best in groups.

Collective intelligence is the idea that “more minds are better than one” when it comes to problem solving.

Crowdsourcing in one example in that it is based on the advantages of “collective intelligence.”
cMOOCs encourage communities of learners to **further design** and advance a course based on their particular interests.

Is in line with **constructivist** teaching and learning models.

cMOOCs seek to disrupt one-directional teaching and learning models (consistent with Freirian pedagogy in some ways).
cMOOCs and Networked Learning

- cMOOCs also tend to stress the networked power of the Internet.

- They seek to connect individual learners and groups as a means of working together to solve complex problems.

- Again, they seek to take advantage of collective intelligence.
cMOOCs and Networked Learning
cMOOCs

- The research literature reveals that cMOOCs hold great value in reaching professional communities of practice.

- Quite useful as a lifelong learning strategy for adult learners.

- They may be less suitable for high school students and 18–23 year olds with limited content knowledge and perhaps limited motivation.

- Also, cMOOCs require complex Internet–based social learning strategies and are not so conducive to economy–of–scale objectives.
xMOOCs

“xMOOC” represents the idea of an "extended" university course aimed at reaching massive numbers of students.

These are by far the most common type of MOOC.

Although Internet and Internet–based apps offer numerous complex and social learning options, the massive quality of xMOOCs often makes these difficult to implement.

Most xMOOCs do not employ advanced social learning strategies and instead resort to one–directional teaching or simple “discussion board” postings.

xMOOCs are often discussed as a partial solution to under–funded higher education systems in that their scalability offers potential cost savings.
Objectives in Moving from cMOOCs to xMOOCS

- Opportunity to expand in *massive* ways using the global reach of the Internet.
- Possibility for course credit and credentialing at a global level.
- Potential to expand access to higher education.
- May expand course availability at under-resourced universities.

**Potential Drawback:**

A problem arises though in that some of these objectives result in compromising the learning benefits of the original cMOOC idea.
xMOOCs and Massification

massive open online courses
Compromises of xMOOCs

1) Massification makes the sophisticated connectivist learning networks stressed by cMOOCs difficult to implement.

2) Course credit and credentialing essentially eliminate the constructivist facets of encouraging users/learners to recreate the course to suit one’s own needs.

3) Sometimes reproduce the one–directional quality of large lecture classes and more traditional teaching and learning models.

4) Course credit also undermines the collective intelligence ideals of MOOCs in that credit–earning students must prove their individual mastery.

5) Additionally, there emerges the problem of authenticating learning outcomes if course credit is to be earned.

6) Further, the problem of authenticating the identity of the user/learner must be resolved.
Further Compromises of xMOOCs

- Finally, when xMOOCs target under-served populations around the world additional problems arise, such as:
  - Internet access
  - Internet speed
  - Technology skills
  - Content knowledge
  - Language differences
  - Availability of testing centers

- Also, xMOOCs used as replacements for lower division courses have not done well (very low retention rates).

- xMOOCs employed as forms of remedial or developmental education also have not done so well (*extra support* is often needed).
xsMOOCs

▶ “xsMOOC” stands for “extra support” MOOC.

▶ Research consistently reveals that under–served and under–prepared students require more face time, not less.

▶ MOOCs designed to serve under–prepared students need “extra support” structures built into them in order to encourage student success (e.g., peer support, technology support, incentivization, etc.).

*** Of course, this undermines the goal of scalability and cost–savings.
MOOCs, High Technology & Higher Learning
Delineates Five Basic Problems in Advancing MOOCs

1. Problem of Epistemology
2. Problem of Pedagogy
3. Problem of Hegemony
4. Problem of Diversity
5. Problem of Academic Labor

- My discussion to this point addresses problems 1 and 2; essentially, the shortcomings of moving from cMOOCs to xMOOCs involve epistemological and pedagogical compromises.

- I will now briefly address problems 3 through 5.
Problem of Hegemony

- Problem of Hegemony—relates to the current and likely dominance of a small number of institutional players (the elite universities) advancing global dominance.

- How can other universities compete against Harvard/MIT (edX) or TsinghuaX, for example, in offering introductory-level MOOCs—And why should they?

- What are the consequences if a small group of elite universities dominate the MOOC landscape—and, in essence, define what constitutes “basic knowledge” at a global level?

- Is there potential for forms of cultural colonialism to be advanced?
Problem of Diversity—relates to the inability of MOOC teaching and learning platforms to adequately account for the diversity of learners (race/ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, disability, learning style, etc.).

This is a major problem in the U.S. and is even greater when we consider MOOCs as global endeavors.
Problem of Academic Labor

Problem of Academic Labor—relates to the fact that one of the biggest appeals of xMOOCs is scalability.

Cost savings may come from the “reproduction” of courses and their distribution to massive numbers of students.

Two democratic ideals are likely to clash here:

1) The ideal of the knowledge commons and the belief that knowledge and information should be widely available;

2) The ideal that workers have basic labor rights and should not be exploited.

Academic workers have a right to benefit from their labor in terms of the production of courses and course materials.
Clearly, colleges and universities “own” a course in terms of its name, course description, and ability to offer the course.

But course content is another matter.

In the U.S., the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) argues that course content represents the intellectual property of the professors who produce courses (akin to their research ideas published in books and articles).

This suggests that faculty must play a key role in decisions about expanding online courses and MOOC–related endeavors.
Considering the global context of the MOOC movement, of course not all countries nor individual universities operate on the same principles and assumptions of the AAUP’s interpretation of intellectual property.

So, it will be interesting to see how this plays out at a global level in the coming years.
Thank You!