

Designing Learner-Centric MOOCs

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Lecture 32

Implementing the Learner-Centric Approach

The first point is that we have to ensure that learners go beyond simply listening to lectures, or simply passively watching videos, and then doing the practice later. For example, we can have LbDs which immediately follow LeDs, so that the learner gets immediate practice and immediate feedback on their actions, after watching a small segment of the video that you want them to learn. So the idea is that you don't want to keep activities to later and you know, expect learners to do them at home, at a different time. So interspersing the activities along with the, you know, lecture content, is desirable and it's a good way of ensuring that learners are not simply passive during the course.

The LCM model naturally brings the idea of learner-centricity through its elements LeD, LxT, LbD, and LxI and this is a structural way of looking at a learner-centric MOOC. But another powerful, equally powerful, and perhaps more important way of looking at a Learner-Centric MOOC is through an interaction lens and the question to ask there is, what are the interactions that a learner is doing with the content, with the instructor, with the TAs, with the other learners and so on?

The idea of learner centricity in a MOOC, the core idea of it, is similar to what instructors implement in a face to face classroom, when for example, they teach using active learning techniques. They do activities, they reflect, they discuss with their neighbours, they write, they draw, they talk, they articulate their reasoning, and what the Learner-Centric MOOC model does, is incorporate these strategies into the new medium.

So getting your material into a learner-centric tone depends heavily on how do you think of these learner connect issues while creating your content. For example, if a question is asked and people are supposed to discuss about it, and if the question has one direct 'yes' or 'no' answer, then probably the person who has visited the discussion forum first time will answer it and the rest of the people will not find any useful material to read along . On the other hand, if the question provides options for the learners to put their diverse viewpoints or even reflect upon each other's viewpoints, and then keep going along with the direction, keeping the central idea of the question, that will result in actual discussion, which is a very positive sign of learning using this, the massiveness and the diversity of the course. So that is one way of keeping the connect throughout the course.

So an important aspect in an online learning, is giving the teaching presence as well as the social presence of the instructor, to better generate learner engagement in the course. Now, these principles of teaching presence and social presence comes from the Community of Inquiry framework. It talks of three different spheres of presence required from the instructor.

One is the cognitive presence, in terms of selection of content, utilization of the learning content. Then there is the social presence, where the instructor tries to create a meaningful interaction with the learners, both in terms of peer to peer connect as well as learner to instructor connect, and there is this overall teaching presence of how they utilize the cognitive presence and social presence to effectively orchestrate an online offering of a course.

So it is important to first, for an instructor, to set the instructional climate by providing meaningful instructions. What are the dos, what are the don'ts, what will the learner get if they go through the, follow the instruction (not just go through), follow the instructions, what are the positives that they will get, and why should they avoid the don'ts.

So this is also another place where the teaching presence plays a critical role and if you are doing a learner-centric MOOC, then it is important to focus on these three aspects of cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence and understanding how they play an important part while you are orchestrating a course, a Massive Open Online Course, with so much diverse learners and so much different levels coming into the course.