

Designing Learner-Centric MOOCs
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Lecture 07
Why LCM?

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In this session, we will discuss why we need learner-centric MOOCs. Many of us are familiar with learner centric in the classroom. We are used to hearing terms like active learning, group discussions, peer-learning and are aware of the benefits of incorporating such techniques in the classroom.

Many of us know that we need to make learners go beyond simply listening to the lectures, taking notes, and executing prescribe procedures. We also know that it is necessary to make learners do immediate practice, figure things out, express their thinking and learn from peers.

In order to incorporate this in a MOOC, we now need to go from thinking about content or being content oriented to thinking about learning or become learning oriented. So our attitude needs to change from how well am I explaining the concept to how well are learners learning the concept.

Consider a MOOC module on a topic that provides a set of 10 short videos. You may have taken such MOOCs yourself, you may have been learners in such MOOCs yourself. After you watch a series of videos, the learners are given some practice questions at the end of the videos. The module also provides some additional resources on the topic and a discussion forum where learners can post their queries to get answers, interact with each other and so on.

The question is: is such a module learner-centric? You have to decide yes or no and you also have to write down one reason for why you think it is so. After doing so, you can resume the video.

Now that you have done this activity, some of you may have thought that this is a learner-centric MOOC but then think about the MOOCs that you have taken. How many times did you post on the discussion forum, how many of those post were pertinent to the content of the discussion and how many of them were about some other logistical aspect? How many references were provided by the MOOC instructors and how many of them did we actually go and look at?

How many times we simply watched some videos and click to the next video halfway through those videos. So it is possible that many learners may not go to the discussion forum at all.

Hence, what is happening if we create a MOOC in which we simply make these things available.

What we mean by these things are: set of videos, a set of practice question, set of resources and a place for discussion. If we just make these four components available to the learner, the

initiative is left to the learner, for doing the practice, for reading and assimilating the resources and for learning from peers.

So, to summarise what is missing, if we simply have these four components, if we simply make these four components available what is missing are: attention to learner and motivation, some learners may want more information on a particular topic, some learners may lack some prerequisite, some learners may have joined your course for a variety of reasons. So the attention to learner motivation needs to be taken into account.

What's missing is getting learners to express their reasoning so that when we simply make some practice problems available to learners there is no mechanism for learners to express their reasoning nor is there any feedback being provided to those learners. If we simply have videos one after the other there are no opportunities for learners to immediately apply their learning. Opportunities for micro-application are missing, formative assessment and customized feedback are missing. Also, if you just make a discussion forum available there are no explicit activities to foster peer-learning and there is no connection of the instructor to the learner.

So what needs to be done? Now an instructor has to do all this in a MOOC setting, where there is distance, keeping the distance the scale and the diversity in mind. Instructor has to design activities that require students to do immediate practice and mechanisms by which students can get specific feedback on their practice. The instructor has to design activities which get students to reflect the thinking, express their thinking, and be able to talk to each other.

The instructor has to design mechanisms which encourage students to go through resources, identify directions in which they want to further their learning and ensure that they have actually benefited from looking at those resources in a meaningful manner, and finally the instructor has to also ensure that students learn from peers. This is one significant advantage which a MOOC setting brings over and above a classroom setting.

The instructor is not the sole authority on the subject and need not be the one who needs to be listened to all the time. There may be students in a MOOC setting who have diverse experiences on the same topic and creating mechanisms by which students can learn from each other and benefit from this diversity is a key thing that a MOOC designer needs to pay attention to.

Now how do we do all this? For this, we have created the Learner-Centric MOOC model, which has Learning Dialogues, Learning by Doing, Learning Extension Trajectories, Learner Experience Interactions, all of which are connected through appropriate orchestration between the course team and the learners, to ensure that the learners are not simply watching the information but are able to assimilate them in a meaningful manner. Welcome to this course on Designing Learner-Centric MOOCs.