

Multicultural Education Program Evaluation

Majd Alomar

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education
Kansas State University

Introduction

This paper reviews a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for multicultural principles according to Banks' (2012) Multicultural Education Program Evaluation Checklist. The paper will discuss the MOOC's strengths, areas of weakness, and needed improvement based on the checklist. Since the checklist is based on evaluating school programs, some of the questions are not applicable to the platform in question. The platform had many strengths and did very well in some aspects of the evaluation. It also had some weakness and areas for needed improvement.

Literature Review

What is a MOOC?

Massive Open Online Courseware is an online phenomenon that has been gaining in popularity in the past two years. MOOCs accommodate the connectivity of social networking, the facilitation of an acknowledged expert in a certain field of study, and a collection of free accessible online resources. The number of participants in a MOOC ranges from hundreds to thousands of students who self-organize their engagement and participation according to their learning goals, prior knowledge and participation, and common interests (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens & Cormier, 2010).

MOOCs share some aspects of traditional courses such as predefined timelines and weekly topics, and they are facilitated by a knowledgeable expert (McAuley et al., 2010). However, in general, MOOCs are tuition-free and require only Internet access to enroll. Moreover, they do not carry formal accreditation, although experts are expecting MOOCs to be provided for university credit in the near future (Pappano, 2012).

What makes MOOCs so successful is their social aspect. Students engaging in

MOOCs sometimes continue to use their central social platform to participate or they may use social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to develop their discussions. Some create their own blogs and develop and maintain ties through these courses. Students negotiate with their peers, work on collaborative projects, and meet others who share their interests and skills. According to McAuley et al. (2010), “the network negotiated is just as important as the topic covered, if not more so. Participation in a MOOC is emergent, fragmented, diffuse, and diverse” (p. or para. # needed here). Students who enroll in MOOCs are often very diverse. They come from all around the world with different languages, backgrounds, age differences and levels of education. Hundreds to thousands of students enroll on these courses.

Advanced online platforms such as Coursera, edX, and Udacity are already attracting millions of students from all around the world, although the retention rate for MOOCs in general is usually less than 7 percent (Parr, 2013). However, we must not overlook the potential that these courses have and the cultural exposure that they provide to their students.

NovoEd

I have chosen to evaluate NovoEd, a MOOC platform offered by Stanford University. Originally called Venture Lab, NovoEd was created by Dr. Amin Saberi and his doctoral student Farnaz Ronaghi with the goal of offering Stanford courses for free to the public. NovoEd focuses on collaboration and project and team-based learning. The platform’s first class attracted 40,000 students from over 150 countries in its first semester. So far, the platform consists of 31 courses available to the general public as well as some private courses available only to Stanford students. To evaluate NovoEd,

this study observed two of the courses available to the public: Technology Entrepreneurship and Storytelling for Change. In addition, two students were interviewed: one male from Pakistan, referred to as student A, and one male from the United States, referred to as student C.

NovoEd promotes ethnic and cultural diversity throughout the total environment of the platform, beginning with the homepage's Highlighted Student Work section. Within that section are photos of a Saudi girl, a Black girl and an Asian girl each displaying projects from one of their courses. The diversity reflected on the homepage of the platform is shown in Figure 1 below.

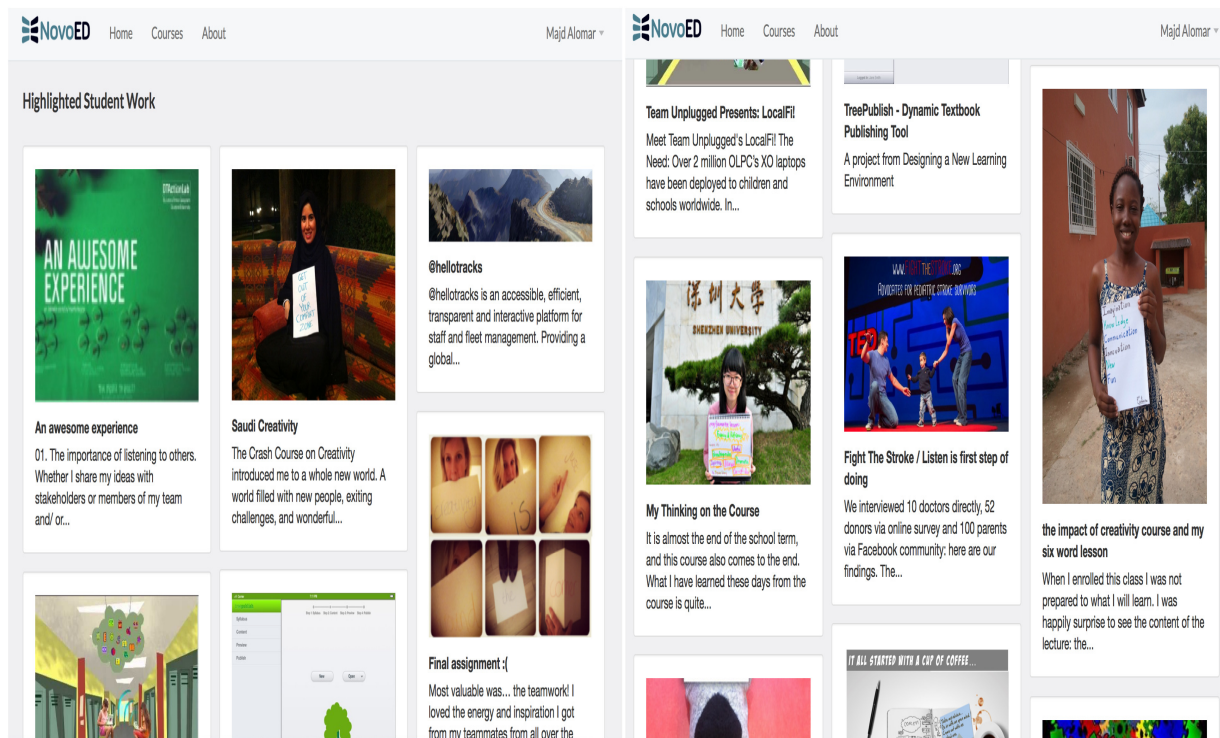


Figure 1

Despite the focus on student diversity, NovoEd's faculty diversity seems lacking. At the time of this study, NovoEd has 48 course instructors and 9 platform development

team members. Seventy-seven percent of the teaching staff and platform team are White (including 2 Iranians), 12% are Asian, 9% are Hispanic and 2% are Black. These statistics were gathered through observation of the platform and researching each staff member's profile.

Though the NovoEd staff is not very diverse, most of them are well equipped with multiethnic and multiracial knowledge. Many have led international projects and worked with international teams. Some have hosted workshops and coached CEOs in other countries. Richard Richards, one of the instructors of Storytelling for Change, has the following in his bio: "Originally from the UK, he has lived and worked in the USA, Germany, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong. While leading teams in Australia, Korea, Israel, China, Mariana Islands, Germany, Chile, Argentina and Mexico, he has acquired a deep appreciation for the world and many of its peoples."

Moreover, Dr. Chuck Eesley, a Stanford professor who is also the instructor for NovoEd's Technology Entrepreneurship course, posted on Twitter about his recent visit to China where he met some of his MOOC students. He has also posted pictures on his blog of a Startup Chile business that started as a result of students' efforts and assignments in his course on NovoEd.

While one study participant expressed enthusiasm about the student diversity, the other expressed practical, logistical complications it comes with. When asked about his experience in the course, Student A described it as "like living in a global village." When asked about his team members he responded, "I like having people from different parts of the world in my team. The international exposure of working with these people was very beneficial. Also we get different points of views when we are working with people from

different countries.” By contrast, student C chose to work with people in the United States. He explained, “I was looking for team members with the right kind of education and skills in the United States.” When asked why he chose all of his team members from the United States, he said, “The time would be different in another country. I did not want to have someone wake up in the middle of the night to meet with us.”

The instructors of the two observed courses seemed to share student C’s concerns. Aware of the difficulty different time zones or poor Internet connections could present, the Storytelling for Change instructors state the following on their course description: “We highly recommend forming a team with people you can meet with in person. If you have a strong internet connection, you could ‘meet’ online as well” (NovoEd, 2013).

One suggestion for the platform would be to have more courses that appreciate the diversity of the students and aim their content for who their students are, instead of the American mainstream. The curriculum for the majority of the courses is taught in English. Only one course out of the 31 currently available, *Evaluación de Decisiones Estratégicas*, is taught entirely in Spanish. In *Technology Entrepreneurship*, one of the earliest courses launched on the platform, the instructor uploads videos on YouTube but also on another video hosting medium for Chinese students who cannot access YouTube due to national censorship constraints in their country. The videos contain Mandarin subtitles. The content, however, is focused on Silicon Valley, which may be somewhat irrelevant to the vast majority of the students as only a small number of the students in the course live in the United States. Student A is enrolled in this course and revealed that he lost interest in the video lectures as he feels they are irrelevant to his life experiences. “I only do the assignments,” he said, “I skip all the lectures and reading.”

The question of content relevancy to a diverse student body arises in other courses as well. For example, two Education courses on the platform focus on developing tasks for Common Core State Standards. The courses will be launched next spring, and my first impression is that they aim to attract and inspire American educators. It seems irrelevant for students from foreign countries, who comprise the majority of students enrolled in NovoEd, to learn how to set practical tasks for United States' Common Core Standards. Granted, the platform is designed so the students can create their own projects, so most students create projects that are relevant to them.

The NovoEd course with the most multicultural curriculum is Mobile Health Without Borders, which will also be launched next spring. Its curriculum includes examples from India, China, and South Africa.

Conclusion

The various projects assigned in the two NovoEd courses I observed encourage creativity and teamwork. The platform itself is designed for team-based education and collaboration. The students attracted to these courses are very diverse and come from countries from all over the world. This exposure is very empowering to students. For this reason, the platform is rated strongly in helping students to examine differences within and among ethnic and cultural groups. The platform is rated lower for having courses that are targeted at the mainstream Americans, though it is rated very strongly for considering Chinese students' needs and making adjustments on the course to suit their needs. On the other hand, it is rated low for recruiting a staff that is mainly White, although one has to take into consideration that they are well travelled and well equipped with experience of working in international and multicultural teams around the world.

References

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