Merging MOOC and mLearning for Increased Learner Interactions

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors suggest the merger of the Massively Open Online Course (MOOC) format and mobile learning (mLearning) based on mutual affordances of both contemporary learning/teaching formats to investigate learner interactions and dialogues in an open online course. The paper presents a case study of how MobiMOOC, a course created using the MOOC format, demonstrates the synergistic characteristics between the MOOC format and mLearning, making a combination of both fields ideal for contemporary, digital, collaborative learning, and knowledge construction based on learner interactions and dialogue. MobiMOOC was a six-week online course focusing on mLearning that ran in April and May 2011. An end-of-course survey provides insight that supports the synergies between MOOCs and mLearning: collaboration, informal and lifelong learning, and dialogue.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Massively Open Online Course (MOOC), Mobile Learning (mLearning), Mobile Massively Open Online Course (MobiMOOC), Open Educational Resources (OER)

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2005, the rise of mobile devices, social media, and learning that is facilitated by new mobile and social technologies has grown exponentially. This rise of new educational forms (both from a pedagogical and a technical point of view) has resulted in a quest for new learning methodologies and frameworks. This paper reconciles a new learning format, the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), with the contextualized nature of mobile learning (mLearning).

The world is changing rapidly. Bell (2011) points out one effect of this rapid change: “since the scope of the change exceeds personal and interpersonal learning activities to include larger scale organizational and societal change, additional theories are needed to explain change, to plan interventions and to develop policies” (pp. 100-101). The synergies between the MOOC format and mobile learning provide insight into new theories that help address the rapid rate of change in today’s world.

The design of learning with and using mobile and wireless technologies, mLearning, is still exploratory as mentioned by Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler (2007). They proceed saying that if mobile technologies are used to support ‘informal, personalized, situated mobile learning’ then the learning designs are much more likely to be exciting, innovative and challenging” (p. 190). mLearning has not yet been tested in relation to MOOCs; however, these two emerging phenomena have some interesting similarities. As Downes states, networks in which people are engaged in dialogue can be small or vast, but the main characteristics for networks to support knowledge development will be that they are “diverse, open, autonomous and connected” and this fits the informal, personalized characteristics relating to mLearning (Downes, 2007). So, if mLearning is time and location independent and contextualized, then is it possible that the pedagogical format of a MOOC fits these specifics? In this paper the authors address that question in the link of mLearning and the MOOC format.

The following sections provide the background, the purpose of the research, the research methodology, a literature review, an overview of MobiMOOC, the results of the MobiMOOC survey, and finally provide recommendations for future research.

DEFINITION AND TERMS

Massive Open Online Course or MOOC

The term Massive Open Online Course or MOOC was first mentioned by two separate individuals: Bryan Alexander and Dave Cormier. The concepts behind and the actual realization of MOOCs were first introduced by Stephen Downes and George Siemens as they were building a course format, the so called Connectivism and Connective Knowledge (CCK) course, which first ran in 2008 (Downes, 2012, p. 10). A MOOC uses social media extensively to build the ad hoc learner community and to allow discussions and resulting learning to take place. Using a lot of social media increases the content that is created, which in turn demands the participants in a MOOC to be more experienced in self-regulated learning or pacing their own learning.

Mobile Learning

It is only in the last few years that the full capacity of mLearning has started to take shape and ubiquity has become a reality. This evolution in learning with mobile devices has resulted in different definitions of mLearning which evolved over time taking into account its most recent developments and understandings. mLearning is defined here as “learning across multiple contexts, through social and content interactions, using personal electronic devices” (Crompton, in press).
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